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PACKRAFTING THE POULTER

Mitch Thorn and Mitchell Radford look for stags and chamois and finish by rafting down the Poulter

PLAN AND PREPARE

Mike Spray dives into what proper preparation for a trip looks like, including a comprehensive gear list

11 INCH CHAMOIS

Ryan McNab hunted for a 10" plus chamois by the age-old adage 'you'll know it when you see it'



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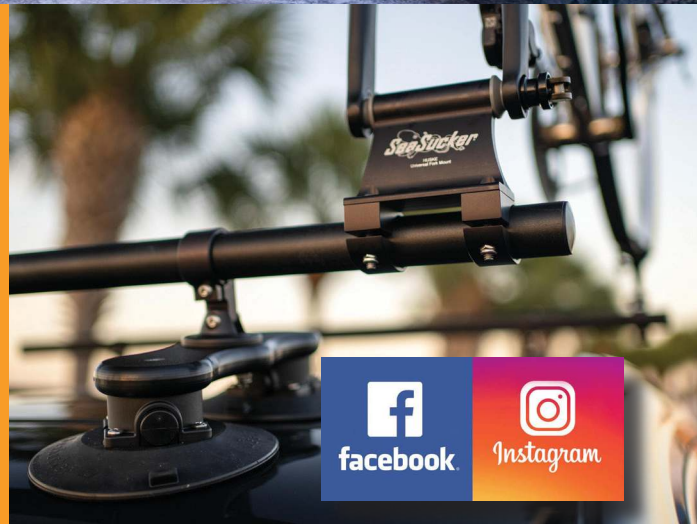


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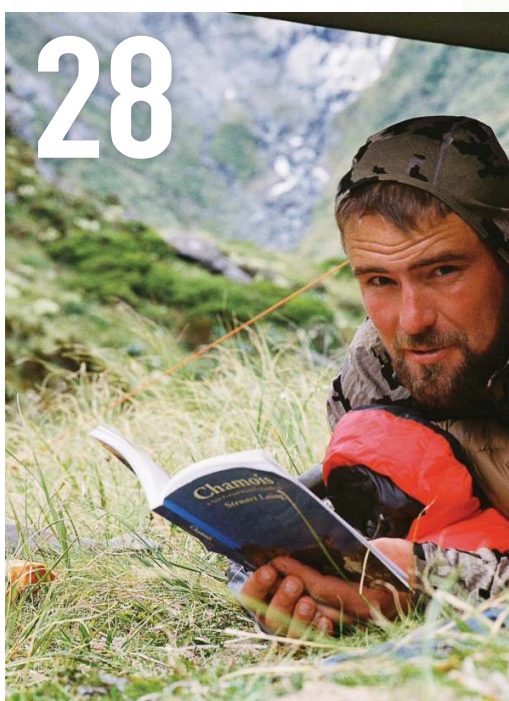
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COVER PHOTO

A young stag coming in close, photographed on West Coast tops by Derek Johnson

NZ Hunter welcomes articles

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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

El Nino is back! That's what I said last issue, but it hasn't eventuated just yet, with more wet weather affecting the East Coast and we've gone from dust back to mud again. Oh well, there's been the odd fine weather window here and there in most places for those of you who have been able to get in the hills.

The Sika Show was a resounding success – apart from the rugby Sunday morning – and there was a lot of great information and displays. Well done to Mike and John and everyone who contributed to making it a great event. And despite the election being over it was great to see National and Act still fronted at the Show. Now while we wait to see the exact makeup of the coalition (at the time of going to print), I feel pretty confident we are going to be able to make some good gains for conservation and hunting over the next few years. **Money is going to be tight and we need to empower and support sensible community initiatives** like those examples from the Fiordland Wapiti, Sika and Tahr Foundations to help our indigenous species while also providing quality hunting opportunities. Hopefully now the election is over unrealistic ideological groups will take the opportunity to try and work with the game animal sector instead of attacking it at every opportunity, and refusing to accept the extremely good work already being done

out there. Hunters and conservationists need to learn to work together better.

To achieve this end hunters MUST step up to the plate with sensible game animal management. There are way too many deer out there in some places, and hunters must do their bit to get those numbers down where they can. And this means targeting the females – the breeding unit. The GAC is doing so much to educate and promote proper game animal management, but I am continually appalled by the bad examples being set by those in the various forms of hunting media. The TV and YouTube shows who continually target the males while filming and leaving large numbers of females need to start acting responsibly. Over and over we see the same people shooting endless 3 to 5 year old stags/bucks/bulls etc, the very animals that must be left to mature, and making no effort to take any hinds/does/nannies. We've even seen shooting a spiker calling it animal management when there were plenty of hinds and does also filmed that could have been shot. Shooting a spiker instead of taking a hind is the very worst example of animal management possible. He is years away from showing his potential, is not going to do any breeding in the near future and certainly will never give birth to more deer! There is never any excuse to take a spiker over a hind even for a meat animal. They are the lowest in the pecking order, and will almost always be in the worst condition of any animal in the herd, and

a hind – even if pregnant right up until the day she drops her fawn – is almost always a better eating animal. If the hinds are skinny, the spiker will be skinnier, and there are obviously way too many deer.

By all means target truly mature trophies while taking out some females, but if you already have a shed full, think again about whether you really need yet another set of antlers/horns similar to what you have already shot. We are going to have to manage our game animal numbers down to significantly lower levels for both their benefit and ours, and the habitat they live in. Skinny deer in a poor quality landscape are no good for anyone, and just provide ammunition for those who oppose the existence of game animals. Once we get animal numbers down into a sensible balance with their natural environment, this smaller herd is going to have a smaller harvestable surplus to share amongst us all, but at least that surplus will be top quality animals – whether for meat or trophies. So do your bit for the future of the herd and hunting (even if for some reason you say you don't care about what the Greenies say) – and shoot some females! And those influencers out there, please do your bit by leading by example! As Cam Speedy so eloquently says – "Save a Bro, shoot the doe!"

Right, lecture over. Hopefully a few of you did better in the Wapiti and Roar ballots than we did. Still, there are plenty of opportunities out there if you are prepared to walk a bit in the free for all country. **Missing out gives you the perfect excuse to go look somewhere new that might just turn up trumps!**

Greg

SPOT THE LOGO

The winners for last issue are **Gareth Hall** and **Rosalee Johnson**. Logos appeared on page 47, the Gunworks advert, and page 65 the Tussock Outdoors advert

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A person wearing a blue shirt, dark shorts, and a wide-brimmed hat is seen from behind, standing on a sandy, rocky slope and looking up at a massive, snow-capped mountain range under a clear blue sky. The mountain peaks are rugged and partially covered in snow, with some green vegetation visible on the lower slopes. The overall scene is a high-altitude alpine environment.

THE INFAMOUS LA PEROUSE

PART TWO

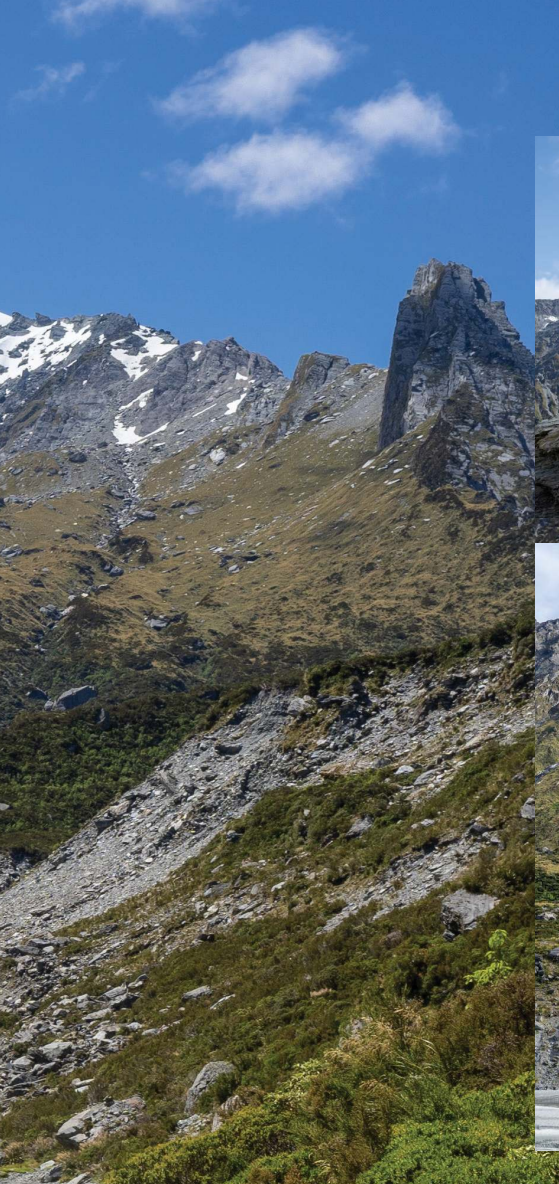
**AFTER THREE
DAYS OF
HUNTING AND
WALKING
WE'D FINALLY
MADE IT IN TO
THE MIGHTY
COOK VALLEY**

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

It had been a great feeling to crawl under the fly the night before, and we'd all planned on a bit of a sleep in, but Nigel and I couldn't help sitting up and grabbing the binos after cracking our eyes open to the magnificent vistas outside of the fly.

With a rest day in front of us we laid gear out, checked the weather, and spent a lot of time evaluating the route up La

Perouse now that we could see it in front of our own eyes. Greg made a final offer to Nigel and I, asking if we wanted to come up the mountain with them. It was conflicting - we had the chance to climb one of New Zealand's most remote peaks with a highly competent crew, an opportunity I was unlikely to have again.



Kea were regular companions, and groups of juveniles like this are always entertaining



The sheer faces at the head of the Gulch



The Balfour Range

But, we were in one of the most remote valleys too, and who knew what incredible old bucks and bulls spent their lives amongst its tussock and boulders. Both Nigel and I declined, preferring instead to spend the extra time hunting in the hopes of finding one of the old mountain hermits.

With that decided the boys bent their heads over maps, started dividing gear and agonising over grams of food to take. With no need to poke my nose in to that debate I went wandering out onto the glacial outwash plain. It was a uniform grey, made up of equally uniform silt particles. This caused an interesting phenomenon, the closest thing you'll find to quicksand in New Zealand. The vibrations of each step caused a little localised patch of liquefaction in the saturated silt, and the reverberations of each step could be seen echoing out in front of you, almost like walking on a huge trampoline. It was rather unsettling!

Out in the plain was yet another interesting formation known as a 'kettle lake' that Nigel had pointed out from the moraine wall. These are formed when glaciers retreat, but leave large chunks

of ice (basically portions of the glacier) behind which then melt slower, forming a depression that fills with water. They're usually a wildly vivid blue and have the exceptional advantage of warming up in summer. This one was no exception, and despite the disquieting quicksand underfoot if you followed a peninsular of larger rocks out you could safely swim and wash away the grime of the trip in 20 degree water. **A luxury rarely found in the wilds of New Zealand's backcountry!**

The following day we had another relaxed start just glassing from the camp while the mountain crew of Greg, Willie, Emil and Pete got prepared. I spotted an interesting bull way up the valley but he was on the move and in the mirage I could do nothing more than mentally mark him as 'interesting' and hope we got another look at him.

After lunch we parted ways. The mountain climbers heading up-valley across the plain to a jumble of boulders that marked the quickest way to their high camp. They were hoping they'd find water at a flat spot at 1620m to base themselves ready for an alpine start and a crack at La Prouse the next day.

Nigel and I backtracked down the valley, to have a better look at the lovely faces underneath Mt Copland that we had bypassed on the race up to camp two days ago. We made it there for the magic hour, which put on a show like only the West Coast can. The stillness in the vast valley with only the muted roar of whitewater to break it is like nothing else. Except for the sandflies, which try very hard to ruin the pervading sense of peacefulness.

Again we spied a handful of animals, only a very few scattered across the vastness, and nothing that caught our eye as particularly interesting so we turned about and bashed back to camp in the dark.

The mountain crew were up at some ungodly hour, and we weren't much further behind. We wanted to poke our nose under the Gulch Glacier before the daytime anabatic wind scented it ahead of us. As we climbed the crumbly moraine we spooked a few young tahr and chamois, but frustratingly, still, nothing very old.

Breaking out onto the tussock beneath La Prouse and the climbers' camp was



The summit ridge - somewhat challenging!



Some screenshots of the footage through the spotting scope on our big bull



idyllic country Sheltered tussock glades amid boulder fields and scrub for cover, it looked perfect, but still – no decent animals! Not even anything worth getting the spotter out for. We contoured right across the face and parked up with a view to watch the team climbing right up onto the NW ridge of La Perouse. We watched the whole time until each little ant-like figure clambered up what looked like a vertical ice wall to the top and out of view, about to deal with the horrible teetering ice slabs along the summit ridge. **With the sun now high in the sky Nigel and I headed home for another swim and a siesta under the fly while the other four slogged it out under blue skies climbing one of our fiercest peaks.**

By mid-afternoon the mountain team had conquered that gleaming white behemoth. Greg got hold of us on the radio and said they'd managed to scale their way to the summit and Pete had finally knocked off the last of his 3,000 metre peaks. A lifetime achievement for him and one of the more savage peaks under Greg and Emil's belts.

Feeling maybe a little guilty at our relaxed camp Nigel and I started glassing again. I spied that elusive bull back under La

Perouse - he only gave us a glimpse, but we decided that was as good a direction as anywhere and packed a few things before heading out onto the toe of the glacier to glass into that country. We'd walked all around it that morning but it was unlikely we'd disturbed animals living in the face.

After several hours we got another quick look at the bull, and with the range now under a kilometre we could see he was 'an absolute thumper' in Nigel's own words. We were still too far to assess age, but he was clearly a good one. The problem was he was living in a horrific area to stalk. It was the worst of scenarios, on a terrace in a face strewn with head-high scrub and house-sized boulders. There was no way to get around him, it was a high-stakes stalk where we'd have to sneak up onto the terrace with him. An iffy proposition to begin with and an absolute nightmare to film.

With no other options we raced over and got stuck in. We wrestled through the scrub and scrambled up onto a large boulder that reared above the surroundings. It wasn't the most comfortable place to cling to, but at least we could see. Crushingingly, there was

nothing to see. The bull was gone. We had no idea if he'd spooked or just quietly fed away.

With nothing better to do we set the rifle and spotter up and settled down to wait. It was another still, humid evening and I ignored the drone of mosquitoes as evening settled around us. Despite the missing bull Nigel and I had the team's happy success in the back of our minds so were quite relaxed as we glassed down-valley, and occasionally spared a glance for the face on 200m away where the bull had disappeared. One on such occasion a flash of golden mane caught my eye and as my heart rate quadrupled I urgently whispered the Nigel that 'he's back, he's back!'

With slow, exaggerated movements I slithered behind the gun while Nigel crouched over the spotting scope. We both knew he was an absolute monster now, I could see age rings clustered at the bottom and knew he was 10+ with fantastic tips – especially for a West Coast bull. He was on to us though, and moving across the face, making life very difficult for Nigel as he tried to track the spotter across, all the while having an eyeful of monstrous horns stacked with age rings adding to his anxiety.

A 15 5/8" bull tahr from one of the most remote valleys in the tahr range. A true trophy of a lifetime



It made for colourful commentary on the TV Show! It was far less stressful for me, all I had to do was track the bull as he stepped daintily along the boulders and try my best not to get fixated on his headgear.

He was a fairly raggedy looking old boy, in full summer coat and no big mane to distract from those outrageous horns on his head. With a thin old face, the curve and sweep of them was unbelievable by comparison. We knew he was a monster. I was doing my best not to look at them and keep my heart from thundering its way out of my chest.

Eventually he stood still for a few seconds at 205 yards, and after a quick check with Nigel I squeezed the trigger. He leapt forward at the shot, which didn't help my sky-high blood pressure, but soon tumbled into the rocks.

Nigel and I yahoo'd and shook hands very enthusiastically, and soon jumped on the two-way radio to fill the team in. Climbing up on the bull it sunk in just what a stunning animal he was. Not a particularly large bodied bull, and the bases the same, it made his length look unbelievable. With no tape all we could do was speculate. I knew he had to be over 14", but Nigel shook his head and murmured that he was probably nearer to 15. I carefully counted up the rings and came out with 12 years. He'd dodged a lot of helicopters in that time, a cunning old boy. Either way it was a bull of a lifetime so we spent a few minutes sitting down and soaking up the moment.

We were in the headwaters of one of the most notorious rivers in New Zealand. In a no-fly zone where very few people, let alone hunters, had stepped foot. To put in all of the effort to get here, the training, the travel, the sheer willpower to climb the passes and gorges. It was immensely satisfying to sit on the side of a mountain with a West Coast legend beside me and a once in a lifetime bull coming home with us.

Before we knew it midnight had rolled around and it was raining, the boys had safely descended and had actually passed beneath us headed for camp.

We followed as quickly as we could and before long clambered up onto the camp terrace, greeted by the tired, smiling faces of the successful mountaineers.

Greg was quick with a tape, and all chat of 3,000m mountains soon faded (Sorry Pete) as he stretched it over the horns. 13 came and went. Everyone was silent. 14 went by. The murmurs mounted. 15 went by. We started shouting. The tape stopped



at 15 5/8ths and I couldn't keep a cheer down. Talk about wide eyes! We were stunned!

The next morning we didn't get a huge sleep in as there the small matter of getting out now. It's all very well to walk in there, but that was only half of the trip. Today we had to face the Balfour Range.

This was a section that had been playing on my mind since the beginning. It was a 900m climb with heavy packs, right on the back of a big day. Never mind the



Willie crossing the headwaters of the Cook



The steep clamber onto the Balfour Range



A much appreciated break as we sat on the razorback top of the Balfour Range

small fact we were one of the first parties to try this traverse! With only six or seven recorded crossings for the whole range.

After the euphoria and hard work of the day before it was a solid effort to clamber up that gutter in steep, crumbly rock with pervasive light rain. I'll admit I got a bit grumpy at one point. Muttering something about 'soft bloody deerstalkers' after one too many jokes about tahr-shooting pighunters.

Once we reached the saddle and had a quick rest with a snack and a sugar hit I felt a lot better. Pretty soon we switched in to descent mode and tested the knees in the slippery north-facing slope. The first hurdle was a waterfall that needed roping down, fortunately we had the gear for that! But as we were halfway through lowering the packs down someone looked below and spied a bloody big bull tahr sitting only 200 yards away, oblivious to the racket we were making. He was old, with horns at least 13 1/2" long.

We filmed him for a while then continued passing the packs down.

We'd already decided not to pull the trigger as we had two epic bulls in the bag already so I was quick to volunteer to take the camera down for a closer inspection.

Sneaking around the tussock I found where he had been, but had clearly moved on. Looking back to the team they gesticulated to sneak around further. Carefully parting the tussock with camera

at the ready I soon saw the summer coat of a bull head down feeding. I kept sliding down quietly with the stems of tussock almost completely obscuring me until I got to ten yards and the crackle of my raincoat caused him to whip his head around at me. **I started firing off shots with the 200mm lens, wishing I had a bit more reach.** He was more perplexed than concerned, turning to look at me fully and snorting like he was disgruntled. It was probably only seconds but it was a great experience to be so close to such a mature bull. I could see the moisture from the clag lining his eyebrows, the chips in his battle-damaged horns and the slight milkiness to his eyes as age was clearly creeping in on the bold old warrior. Eventually he bounded away, stopping to look back multiple times. A real highlight of my time in the mountains and I'm glad I got the chance to experience it as in most instances that is the type of bull you wouldn't hesitate to shoot.

After that I raced back up to the team so we could continue onto our campsite. Nige found us an eyrie hanging over a 400m bluff staring into the Balfour River. It was a great campsite, but walking to the edge certainly brought on a bit of vertigo. Right on dark we heard four shots over toward McKenna so we knew we had company in the valley.

The morning forecast showed bad weather moving in less than 24 hours

from then. We had a lot of decisions to make, the main one being could we get out in a day. It was scarcely conceivable, especially for the mountain crew fresh off a 3000m peak, but the alternative was camping up somewhere for three-four days while the front rolled through. The only option was to put one foot in front of another and see how far we got to re-evaluate at lunch. The mood was further soured as we saw a helicopter sneak over the Fox Range and drop in to McKenna Creek, and five minutes later come sneaking out of the bottom. **This was most definitely a no-fly zone and looked like it was going to wreck McKenna for us, the only possible silver lining of staying through the weather.**

The outlook wasn't helped by the 500m descent through steep tangled West Coast scrub and moraine. So dense it managed to yank the tip out of my walking pole at some point! Despite the trials everyone was in high spirits. Hunting had fallen by the wayside a bit as we were in full race mode, so we could be loud and chatty and egg each other on.

Before we knew it we were looking up at the Hen and Chicken Range, and with so much country behind us we attacked it with barely a blink before finally topping out to look down into the idyllic McKenna Creek. We stomped around to the campsite the team had used on an earlier trip, where Willie shot an epic 14 year old



Willie working his way down the west face of the Balfour Range



A cherished encounter getting so close to this big old bull

13" bull from, and found the disgraceful site of a messy camp. Unburied waste, half-eaten porridge scattered about and rubbish left wedged in a fire. It was a terrible look anywhere, but to really add the icing to the cake they had illegally flown in and hunted the valley before we got there!

We sat down for a proper lunch break and a big feed. Boots came off, coffee was brewed and we had a serious round-table discussion about whether it was realistic to push on from here or wait out the weather. As soon as we left we were committed. Rain would remove two of the three exit options, and require us to climb quite high to get out.

The consensus was to go for it, but there was no doubt we were all nervous about the prospect. It had been a gruelling few days, a huge morning, and to walk all the way out with the shorter half of a day ahead of us seemed crazy. To top it off Nigel was 'crossing his fingers' that we'd get out his planned route – confidence inspiring!

We pushed on steadily, climbing our way onto the Fox Range. Despite the fatigue we were a slick unit by then. Our pacing was great, our chat was positive and everyone was having a good time plugging away at the mountainside. I was definitely on a bit of a sugar/exhaustion high and felt fantastic as we topped over the ridge and saw Fox Glacier township spread out below us. A long, long way below us.

Mentally, the uphill had been the challenge to surmount in my mind. Now that I was at the top, staring down the barrel of a gruelling, dangerous, 1400m

descent when it was already 7pm, I'll admit my mind quailed a little at the prospect.

On tired legs we started dropping down in to Straight Creek. A washed out, gorgy, boulder strewn bowling alley. Only we were the pins and rocks were the bowling balls. Soon a light rain settled in and we faced the first waterfall. This one we could skirt and clamber down. They got progressively more challenging, but with the rain increasing we couldn't spare any time at all otherwise we'd be stuck in Straight Creek with a storm coming, and be stranded on the wrong side of the Fox River.

I was absolutely exhausted, my knees were throbbing, and the one bluff that we had to descend by holding on to boulders directly under the waterfall was not an enjoyable moment. There were cubic metres of water dousing me, pouring between my pack and body, and chilling me far more than I wanted. The one consolation was that all my team mates were going through the

exact same thing and none of them were exactly grinning.

Stumbling out onto the banks of the Fox was cause for a grin or two, but looking forward was sobering as the glacial Fox River swept by in front of us. We linked arms, with the heavy boys at the front and Pete swinging in the water between Greg and Nigel in the middle. Careful, steady plodding had us safely on the other side.

After that it was simply a crushing, grinding, body-breaking walk out into Fox Glacier township seven kilometres away. We stumbled onto the steps of Fox Café at 1.30am. 17 hours on the feet, with outrageous metres of elevation covered.

Looking back on this trip it was an absolutely formative week in my life. Leaving aside the once in a lifetime bull, simply surviving that savage, wild country was an achievement. To complete such a monumental traverse with a bunch of epic people is something indelibly etched in my mind. Here's to more of them team.



The Balfour Valley, a rugged remote place I was disappointed to have to race through in just a day



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DETECTION DISTANCE	2600M	1800M

SPECIFICATIONS	IA-612 MODELS	IA-312 MODEL
CONTINUOUS DIGITAL ZOOM	2.8X - 22.4X	3.4X~13.6X
DISPLAY TYPE	AMOLED	
DISPLAY RESOLUTION	1024*768	1024*768
VIDEO RESOLUTION	1024*768	
WIRELESS PROTOCOL	WI-FI	

OPERATING TIME		
IA-612 PRO ≥13hrs	IA-612 LRF ≥12hrs	IA-312 ≥13hrs
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ROAR REDEMPTION

WRITTEN BY ~ JASON VAN BEERS

**AFTER A COUPLE
YEARS OF
“DROUGHT
ROARS” I WAS
SEEKING ROAR
REDEMPTION
AND MY MATE
LACHIE WAS ON
THE SAME PAGE**

We planned to hunt two Southern Alps ranges that we had scouted previously, using our knowledge from past experiences.

The last weekend in March saw us heading on our first trip to an area in which I had hunted during the previous roar. I had taken a shot at a decent stag but missed or wounded, and hadn't recovered him. Experiencing the feeling of guilt is terrible for any hunter; there's nothing worse having this experience when hunting. I made the effort to go back three weeks later with Lachie and my

dog to attempt to find the carcass but had no luck. Naturally, this stag weighed on my mind for the following twelve months, so the plan this time was to see if that stag was still alive in the hope that we could get on to him again. Additionally, as we knew of the quality genetics of the area, the chances of coming across another big boy were high. The country is steep and eroded and has some nasty bush, but plenty of deer due to most folk being put off by the challenging terrain.

On the first evening and after a couple



of hours by headlight we made it to one of the very few flat bush campsites, just big enough for our tent. No roars were heard that night, but we weren't surprised as it was so warm. The next morning we were greeted with a bluebird day, and it was already getting hot; this was to be the trend for our roar. It felt like we were hunting in the middle of summer and it became a bit of a running joke that we were "roar hunting in summer".

After packing up camp we progressed up the spur and, after a really good old bush bash, broke out into the clear. Lachie instantly picked up a stag with the binos, glowing in the morning rays in a steep grassy gutter around the face from us in the left-hand gully. On further inspection, we picked up three more deer, which were another stag and two spikers. We were surprised the stags were still grouped together, given that it was supposedly the roar and being the end of March. But, these stags were clearly in prime condition and showed no signs of rutting activity. I pulled out my spotting scope to assess them and quickly realised that the bigger of the two was potentially a shooter. We had time to thoroughly assess this big heart-shaped 11-pointer. What luck! I then had a realisation that he looked very similar to the stag from the previous year. I pulled up a photo of the stag on my phone and we both agreed that this was the same stag - redemption was on the cards! There was a real moment of relief knowing he had survived.

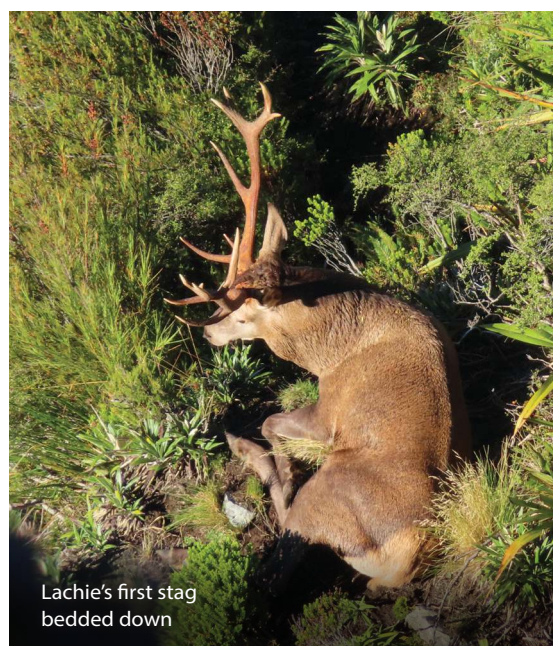
At this stage he was out of range so we decided to climb further up the spur and come around above so that we would be about 100 metres from him. Once above



Sunset in the Southern Alps



The stags sunning themselves, including the big 11 I missed the year before



Lachie's first stag bedded down

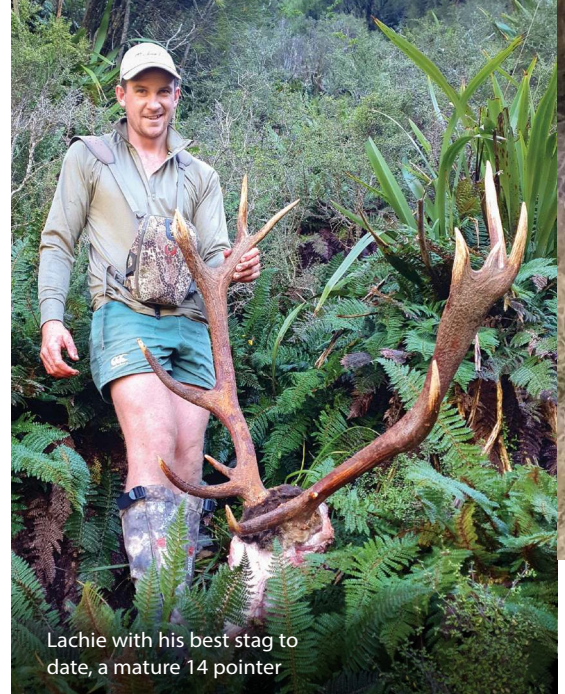
was a case of stalking through the top of several steep narrow sub-alpine gutters until we found the right one. Eventually, with the breeze blowing up towards us we located the younger stag below. He was giving some scrub a good tong up with his antlers, and with nice crowning tops, showed strong potential to be a future trophy. We crept closer across a shingle patch to a rocky outcrop and once there, we could see down and around the corner of the gut there I located a large stag sitting down soaking up the sun. We could clearly see he was a mature animal with a filled-out neck, big frame and long strong antlers. Lachie was behind the rifle for this hunt and got into position. He didn't muck around and skilfully made the steep downhill shot. It was a good hit, and the stag ran out of sight before we heard the crash of breaking branches indicating he had fallen.

Climbing down the steep gut filled with tall flax we eventually found him. Fortunately for us, his antlers had pinned him to the hillside, stopping him falling further into the gully. We were thrilled to have shot a mature stag on only day two. He had a huge body and 14 points with quite unique tops. After a few minutes of admiring his antlers we both realised that this stag had bez tines which meant he was a different stag than the one we had seen when we first broke out of the bush. So the big 11 I had missed the previous year had escaped from me yet again. I am still trying to track him down even now and we have nicknamed him the "invisible stag".

We managed to work the stag into a flat enough spot to take the head and some meat and then climbed the couple of hundred metres back up to the top of the spur. Refuelled with kai we found a shaded overhanging rock to hang



Jase hanging onto Lachie's first stag on the steep face



Lachie with his best stag to date, a mature 14 pointer

the meat and stash the head where we would collect it on the way back out. Carrying on up the spur over 500 metres of vertical gain and over a main range and we made camp mid-afternoon at 1650 metres. **That night we headed west down a long flat spur to listen into the surrounding gullies and basins in the hope of hearing deer to target the following day.** As we were observing the area below us, a massive wave of fog rolled in and eventually engulfed the entire area we were glassing. Unfortunately, we didn't see or hear any stags that evening so it was back to camp for the night, still having not heard a roar for the trip so far.

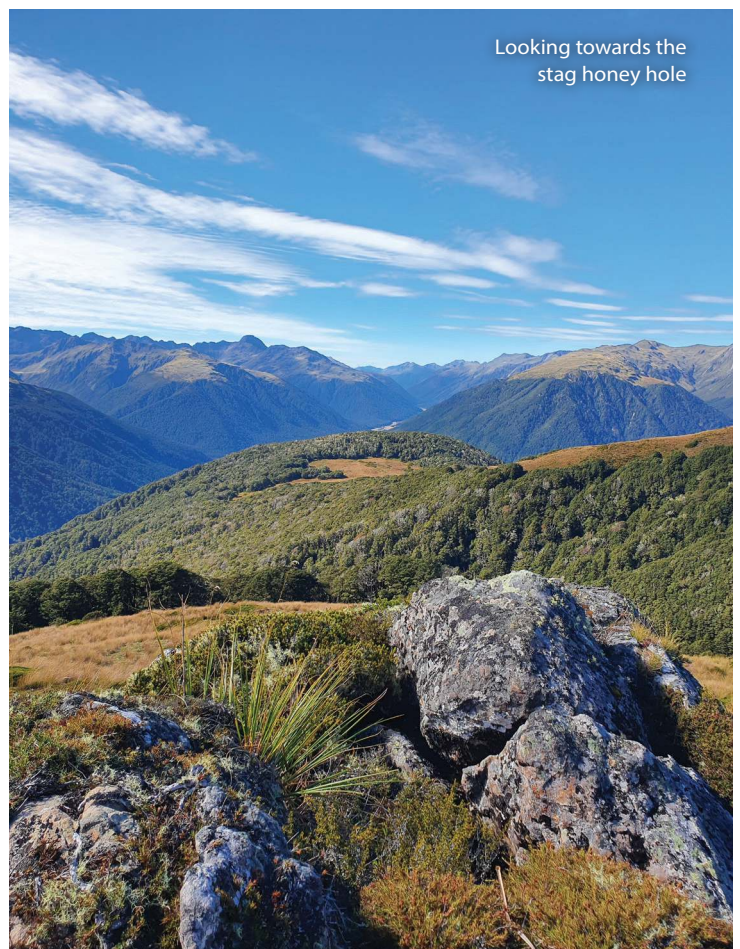
The next morning dawned clear again

so we set off down the long spur to the west and we bumped into three chamois just ten minutes from camp. They ran across a shingle scree below us, which was a pleasant surprise, and with no buck, they were safe from us. We spent the morning hunting right the way to the end of the flat spur and finally got on to one roaring stag right down in a flax-covered face. **He was a young 8-pointer holding a handful of hinds but not the calibre of stag we were after.** Given the warm conditions and the lack of deer seen or roaring heard on the western side of the range, we decided our effort was better spent on the eastern side, where we had shot the 14-pointer and hopefully would

locate the 11-pointer again. We hunted our way back east, collected camp and dropped into the steeper bush-covered gullies. Although we spent several hours listening from prominent positions, trying to hear moaning Reds, there was still no noise. **Late in the day, we picked up Lachie's stag as we passed by.** It was pretty clear that the roar hadn't really started in this area just yet so we decided that as we had got what we came for in the form of a mature stag, we would grind out the remaining few hours with a steep down and up to the car park. Back at home for the night we restocked supplies and then hit the road early the next morning with a four-hour drive to the next public land range on the main divide.



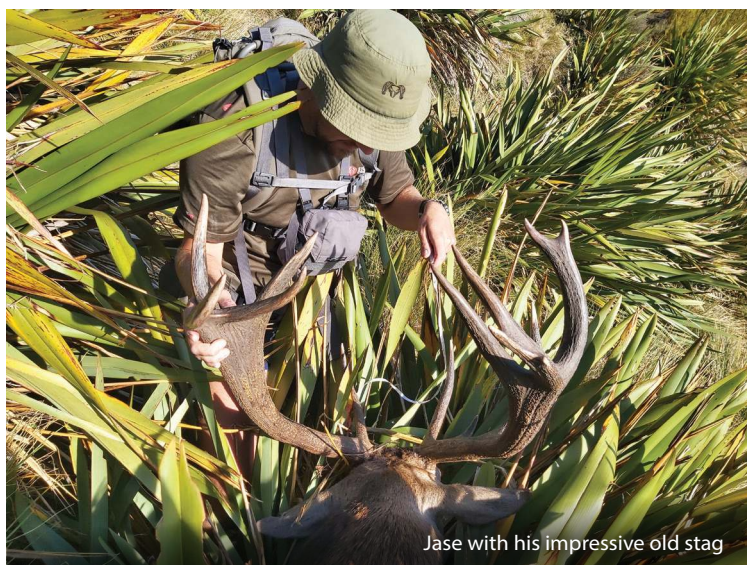
Perfect weather allowed us to camp anywhere



Looking towards the stag honey hole



The solid 15 pointer harassing a hind



Jase with his impressive old stag



Timber!

Our second foray was to a range that we had hunted the previous summer and where we had seen a couple of good stags. We hiked along an unnamed creek for five hours and as we approached the head basin, we heard several stags roaring and saw fresh sign everywhere. **This was exactly what we had been seeking.** A little further in, and on the far side an idyllic clearing, there was a stag roaring. I gave a quiet moan, then he simply walked out and showed himself as a young first head, 6-pointer. I snapped some photos as he was nothing to get too excited about, and then we manoeuvred around him and climbed up out of the bush to the open.

We didn't quite make the campsite we hoped for as we ran out of light and were both feeling pretty buggered, so just pitched the tent in the first spot we could find on the bush edge. This turned out to be the right call because there was a stag roaring well further up the face and to the left near a prominent side stream. He made noise constantly all night, which had us in high spirits for the following morning; dawn couldn't come fast enough. With a hot brew in hand the following morning we quietly crawled out of the tent and started glassing the head of the side stream trying to locate

the stag we had heard all night. After just five minutes Lachie spotted him about 500 metres away in tall snowgrass. He was still roaring well, holding several hinds and was fixated on a young hind that was clearly in heat, which certainly helped our chances. Whilst not overly long and wide he was a solid stag with very heavy timbered antlers, sporting what looked to be 14 points.

We took plenty of photos and video to assess his age and with such heavy-timbered antlers I was confident that we were looking at a mature animal. The exit route for the deer was down the side stream below our camp back into the bush cover along their well-established trails. As the day started to heat up it wasn't long before the small mob started heading for cooler cover of the canopy. They closed the gap to around 300 metres and were now directly across the gully from us. Giving me plenty of time to wait for the stag to present a good broadside shot. My 7mm Rem Mag rang out and my shot went a fraction too high but he wasn't going anywhere and expired quickly. I still had a mouthful of coffee left in my mug. Knowing the stag was dead we decided to quickly head around to the right from camp to get a better look into the main

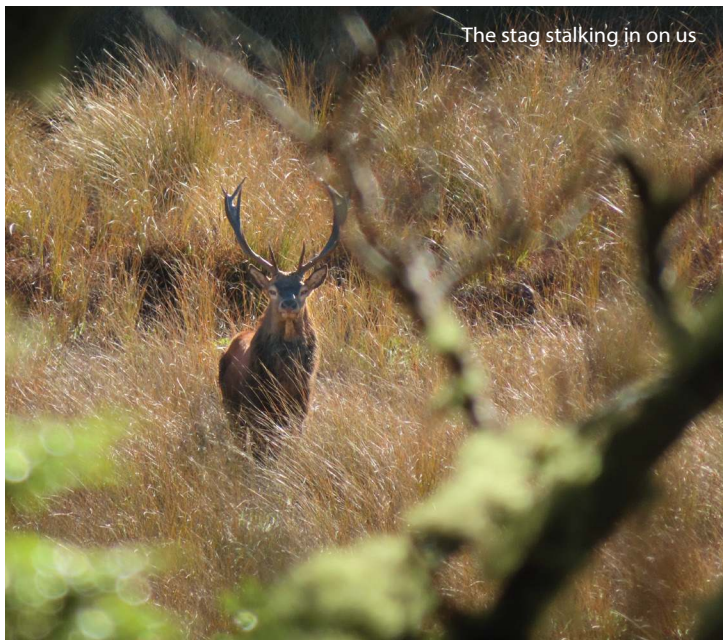
head basin to see if there were any more stags in there we hadn't heard or seen. We saw a few young deer but nothing of note, so went back to retrieve my stag.

On reaching the animal we were both blown away by the thickness of his antlers, such a nuggety old stag with 15 tines and big impressive tops. Now with our second mature stag in five days of roar hunting we were up to 29 points total for the roar, and it was good to finally hear some proper vocal stags. The day was another scorcher, and we took our time to drink plenty of water and get some shade in the creek at the bottom before heading back to pack up camp and then climbing high up onto a main range to the south-west over the rest of the day.

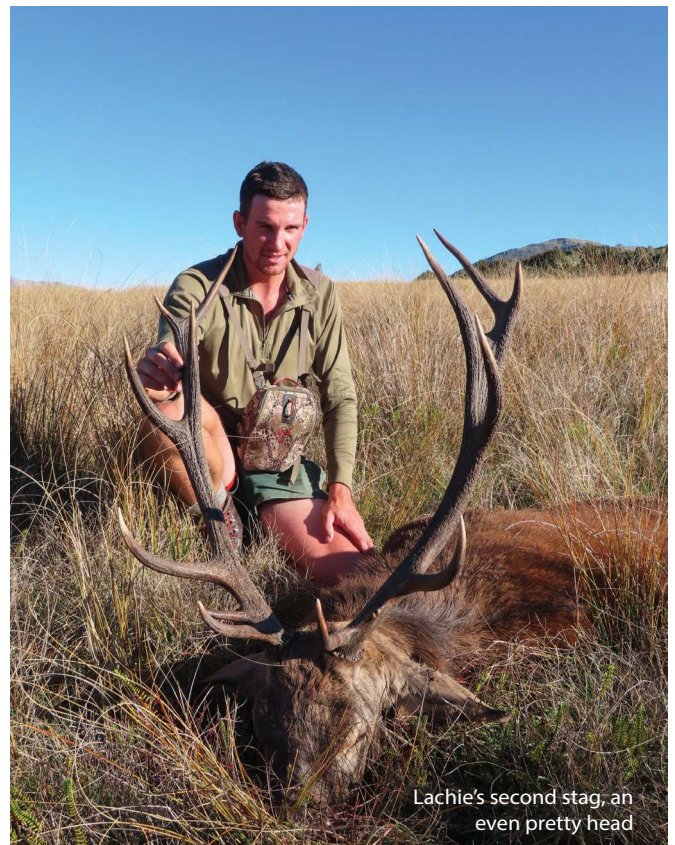
As we crested the ridge Lachie saw another hunter coming up an opposite spur to meet us. We had a good catch-up with him and learnt he'd also shot a reasonable stag that morning. Upon seeing the 15 pointer strapped to my backpack he exclaimed "you shot my stag mate" and proceeded to tell us he'd hunted this stag the roar prior and had shot at and missed it at close range. He had then attempted to try again in the middle of winter but conditions were



Stalking through picturesque terrain



The stag stalking in on us



Lachie's second stag, an even pretty head

too snowy and icy so he was forced to turn back. He was good about it though, and was stoked to see it up close and congratulated us. Cheers Adrian. Competing with fellow hunters is one of the challenges of public land hunting and part of the appeal for me.

The following morning, we dropped down into the head basin north of camp. On a summer hunt the previous year we had seen a long-antlered 10-pointer right on dark in this basin and put a stalk on him but ran out of light and bumped into a hind who unfortunately gave us away. We were hoping he would have set up here for the roar too, but we were surprised we didn't get onto any mature stags given the amount of fresh sign around.

By mid-morning the wind was blowing steadily up the gully so we headed down to stalk the river flats through bush terraces. Along the way we came across a

young stag making a bit of noise on the true right, holding several hinds, which was a bit of excitement for the morning. Not long after we were glassing up on the true right and all of a sudden three young stags came racing over the sky line and made their way down into the bush in front of us. They didn't seem spooked, more just being young teenagers having fun, which was quite comical to watch. We continued down, stalking the bush, and eventually the gully sides started getting steeper and turning into a gorge, so we opted to sidle up and out of the gully on the true left back out to the tops which would put us on the same ridge as camp but further to the west. We were travelling towards a honeyhole looking spot we'd studied on the map

and seen from afar the previous summer. A large flat-topped tussock ridge tapers down into the bush with grassy clearings, swampy tarns and patches of beech trees. **An idyllic looking spot where there just had to be a stag living.** On breaking out of the bush we ate a late lunch and picked up a grumpy 10-pointer roaring on the opposite side of our wee basin. We let him be and sidled around the head of the basin in order to get onto the top end of the ridge that ran down towards the honey hole. At about 3 pm as soon as we sat down we saw a stag sprinting across the middle of the far clearing, being chased by an even bigger



stag grunting. Turns out our assumptions for this spot being stag central were correct. Both stags disappeared, and we didn't manage to get a really good look at the bigger one as they were moving too fast but had the impression he was worth being patient for. We walked further down the ridge getting closer and nearly an hour later the larger stag stepped out onto the clearing, looking as if he owned the place, regularly letting out roars.

We were about a kilometre away but could tell through the spotter that he had four points on each set of tops, so with the day getting on we commenced the stalk down the ridge.

The wind was perfectly in our favour, and the stag was resting near a wallow behind a patch of trees within the clearing. We just had to figure out which patch he was in once we got in close because the perspective of the terrain changed the closer we stalked. Edging toward him we came to a patch of trees where we were concealed and could see out across the clearing to the patch where we saw him last. The bush floor was extremely noisy, so we had to move slowly. **Eventually, we laid eyes on him, probably about the same time he heard us.** He seemed to assume we were the intruder stag coming back for more and he started walking straight towards us, essentially

doing the job for us. I managed to get some great footage of the stag coming in. The wind was a bit more unpredictable now, and Lachie was about 15 metres in front and to the side of me while I was filming. I could see the stag trying hard to catch our scent on the breeze and all I kept thinking was "hurry up mate he's going to bolt!".

Then the rifle broke the silence and Lachie dropped him on the spot at about 70 metres. It was an exhilarating stalk in such a picturesque place, the adrenaline dump was huge and we couldn't have asked for better. We were slightly disheartened when we reached him due to the smaller body size than we expected which unfortunately gave the antlers a bit of ground shrinkage. Nonetheless, we were still very happy with him, and aside from the stag I took the previous day, he was far superior to any other stag we had seen. **He had 13 points and if he hadn't snapped off a bey tine would have been a perfectly even 14.** We were now burning daylight and still had a fair way to go to get back to camp so we got to work removing the antlers and meat.

Back up on the main range, we thought we'd do a final glass for the evening into the gully on the eastern side, and then heard a stag moan sounding not too far down the face from us. Still running high

on adrenaline we thought we may as well have a crack so we dropped several hundred metres down towards the stag and spent about an hour searching for him. The bush edge revealed a handful of hinds but the cunning animal never did show himself. **The last couple of hours back to camp was in the dark with headlamps on. It had been another big, eventful day.**

Our last day of the trip dawned clear yet again but a bit colder; we really had a perfect run of weather. We had another glass in the east-facing gully we had hunted the evening prior in the hopes of locating that cunning stag but didn't pick him up. Then it was time to shoulder our heavy packs for the long walk back to the car park. Along the way we bumped into a decent young 10-pointer, in the same area we looked at immediately after shooting my stag on the second day. Seeing this stag was the icing on the cake and gave us peace of mind that we'd covered the surrounding gullies effectively. The cold beer we left in the river near the car park went down a treat, that's for sure.

Three truly wild public land stags, in two different areas of the Southern Alps, in just over a week made for a very successful roar in our books and one that certainly felt like redemption.





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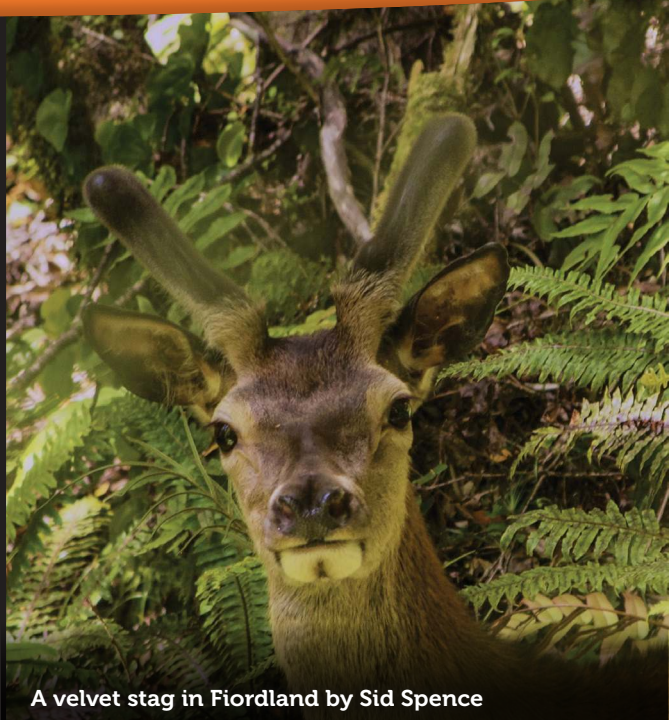


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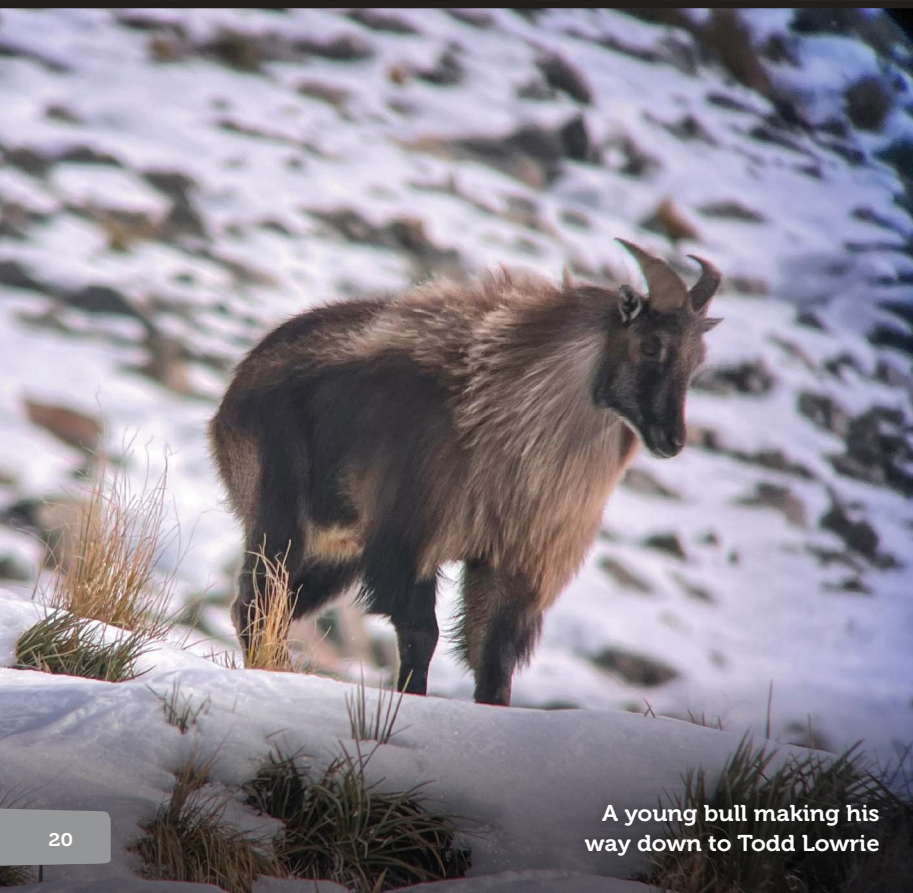


WINNER

Joseph McDougal - an old Wapiti bull from Mt Tanilba earlier this year



A velvet stag in Fiordland by Sid Spence



A young bull making his way down to Todd Lowrie



Stuart Langslow spotted this Fallow spiker



James Hamilton with a bull photographed through binoculars



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SO YOU WANT TO BE A PROFESSIONAL HUNTER? CULLING

WRITTEN BY ~ JASON HART

Max Priest's dog Shade with
a young goat on the bail

My first stint as a professional hunter saw Dougal Satherley and I camped at Waiaua Gorge hut on Mount Taranaki

Dougal was showing me around the block, and in typical Taranaki fashion the weather was wet and windy. Our first hunt had us working our way through the flat country between the Okahu and Oaonui streams, keikei and supplejack grabbing and trying to trip with every step

It wasn't long before Dougal's dog Jess opened up with a good bail, and as we worked our way through the myriad of swamps and tangled bush to secure my first tail, I was hooked. We were expected to spend extended periods in the bush, follow the rules, dispatch as many animals as possible, submit the tails, and hunter's

diary, and get paid for it. What more could I ask for?

"Professional hunting" or "hunting for a living" for many of my teammates and associates and I has been based around ungulate control on knockdown, suppression or eradication operations, primarily targeting species such as goats, deer, pigs, tahr, chamois and more recently, wallaby throughout their North and South Island ranges. A very different mindset is required when you enter the professional hunter ranks.

The original government shooters or "deer cullers" operated throughout the country and were employed by the Internal Affairs Department (IAD), then New Zealand Forest Service (NZFS) and finally by the Department of Conservation (DOC). These hunters worked on several species within their control areas. Extended trips into the

backcountry with limited communication and in average conditions were suited to a select few.

I have been in a full-time hunting role since the summer season of 1995/96 barring an 18-month period where I co-managed possum control for Horizons Regional Council. I started with DOC as a wage hunter/employee and from 2004 as a private contractor. During this period, I have worked with more than fifty hunters, trained numerous new hunters and dog teams, delivering operations throughout New Zealand and in Australia. Fulltime jobs were limited to working for DOC in a permanent team or on short-term wage contracts over the summer, or in the odd shooting role for a forestry company.

Over the past 20 years, a transition from DOC staff hunters to contract hunting has occurred.

A recent national professional hunters conference identified approximately 170 operators throughout the country, of with ~50 work full time on ungulate control. Opportunities to develop a career within the ungulate control



Always nice to turn up to the bail when there is more than one



Dogs are an important part of the operation, Brew here with another bail up



A good meal after a long day on the hill is essential



My first tail on the job, Mount Taranaki

sphere in the industry have increased in recent years, primarily as a result of the demand from both the private sector and an increase in funding by local and central government. DOC's Te Ara Ki Mua framework outlines plans for regional collaboration, site-based adaptive management and monitoring, and analysis of the impact of wild animals, suggests an increase in capacity and capability requirements. Certain sites are chosen based on various criteria, including but not limited to the preservation of assets such as agriculture and silviculture, biodiversity values, and the ability to maintain pest-free zones, among other factors. **These sites are located on both Public Conservation Land and Private Land.** The operations are funded privately, or by central or local government, or through a collaboration of both. The intensity of control is a direct result of operational goals and availability of funding; for instance, a knock down operation will cost a lot less than an eradication operation. Contracts with local and central governments

are obtained through either tendering or direct sourcing, depending on the budget. Private operations are usually sourced through word of mouth or recommendations from previous employers.

As has already been stated by both Joseph and John in earlier issues, no matter what type of professional hunting you do, life isn't always "a cake walk". Long days can be cold and wet and simply hard grind. Don't get me wrong, you'll have plenty of great days too, and see some amazing places and sights. If you love being outdoors, hunting and working with dogs, this could be the job for you.

THE ROLE

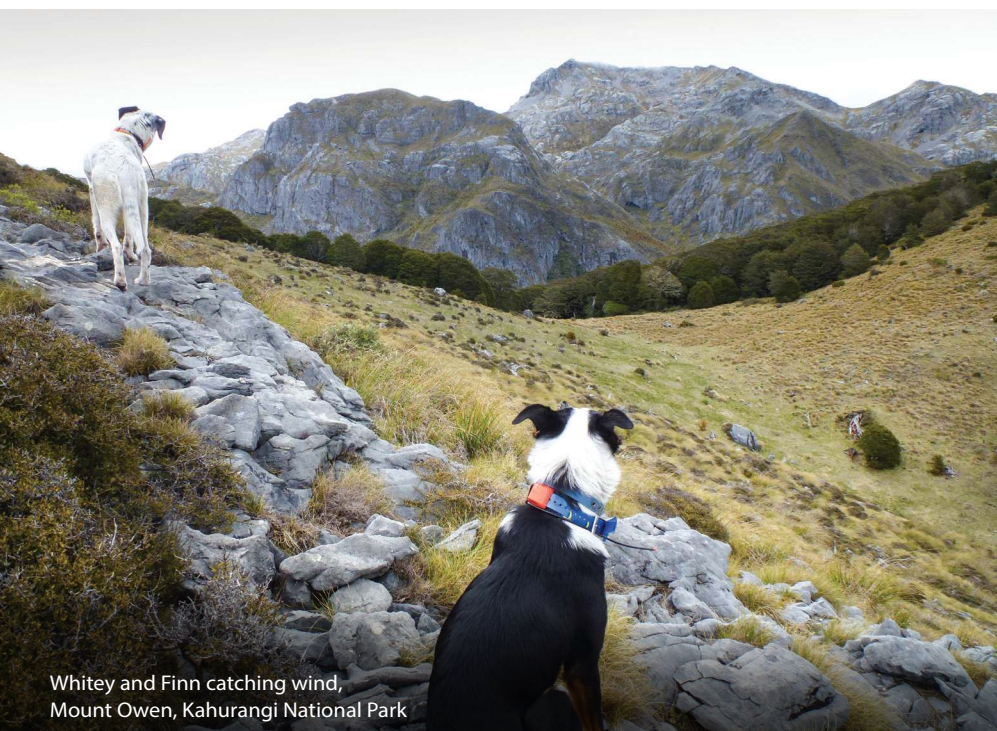
Be prepared to spend A LOT of time on your feet. An average day can vary between 7-12 hours, covering from ten to more than 20 kilometres per day depending on time of year, the terrain, vegetation cover and animal densities. This may go on for ten days straight, followed by a four day break, for 200+ hunting days per year (weather permitting). From memory, my hunting mate and I had a day where we hunted over 50 kilometres and picked up over 60 kills. Animal numbers vary greatly depending on the blocks and operational



A typical tent camp, made a little easier by dropping hunters and gear in by helicopter



Hunter Jason Birchall, happy to be back at camp after a long, wet day on the hill



Whitey and Finn catching wind, Mount Owen, Kahurangi National Park

type, from 0 to 500+ for a stint. You will carry a day bag or pack daily, shooting, training dogs and working solo or in a two-person team. You'll need the right mindset, attitude and drive. There will be little or no cell communications, and you'll miss out on a lot of town life, parties and family events.

I suggest researching established companies or contractors with a good track record in your desired field of work. Make contact and arrange a meeting, talk about requirements, expectation, work prospects, continuity of work and development opportunities within the company.

When engaging prospective hunters and during the trial period, we cover health and safety, operational procedures,

range time (including off-hand shooting practice), camp craft, hunting, and working with dogs. **If you are a good fit for the company and the job is what you expected, an opportunity could come your way.** Be prepared to listen, learn and work hard if you get the call up. I find the best trial times are during winter, when it's wet and cold and you're tenting. This tends to sort out whether a candidate is keen or not.

Control techniques vary from traditional day hunting with indicating or finder/bailing dogs to night hunting with firearms equipped with thermal or night vision optics. The use of drones equipped with standard and thermal cameras for surveillance and hunter assistance is becoming more prevalent for both day and night. Traditional and thermal-

assisted aerial control is also a method used in the right situation. It can knock down high populations quickly and cost-effectively and can minimise the risk of hunters having to traverse into dangerous terrain.

Control operations fall into three broad categories: knockdown, sustained/suppression or eradication. Not all hunters are suited or have the appropriate mind set to be good at all three. The ability to shoot large numbers of animals is at one end of the scale and working thousands of hours for no or very few kills at the other, as on an eradication operation. In one operation, we spent over 5000 hours searching for targets without any kills. This involved covering tough terrain, monitoring radio collared animals, and collecting scat samples. While some may think this was a waste of time and money, the cost of eradication is not cheap or easy.

Pay rates vary from company to company and whether you are engaged as a sub-contractor (where you have to supply all of your own equipment and cover compliance costs) or an employee, but you should expect to make in the vicinity of \$250+ (on wages) to \$500+ per day (on contract) depending on your equipment, experience and ability.

To maintain continuity of work, there will be expectation that you will need to travel around the country. **These operations run throughout New Zealand and can take you from Northland to Southland and, if you can secure them, occasionally overseas opportunities are available.** There are many various work environments ranging from the remote backcountry of Kahurangi National Park to urban ungulate control visible from Auckland's Sky tower.



Capturing a judas goat on an eradication operation in Australia



Hunter Jeremy Walsh with thermal optics on night control operations



Thermal optics are a great addition to the toolbox to aid with deer control

QUALIFICATIONS

Obviously, there are some compulsory licencing and compliance requirements which include Firearms and Drivers licenses, and current First Aid certification. Additional certification in side by side, 4WD and ATV use is also beneficial, and some companies run pre-employment drug testing. You may also have to complete a police check. Organisations have specific requirements for standard operating procedures and protocols that must be followed, such as the recently confirmed SOP for wild animal detection dog-handler teams, lone workers, firearms, and so on. A contractor must also bear compliance costs such as public liability, commercial vehicle insurance, health and safety systems and PPE to name a few - which also reflect in the difference in contract and standard wage rates.

Age or sex is no restriction; it is all about your physical ability, hunting ability, mind set and commitment. I have worked with hunters from 16 to 60+ years of age; however most hunters are aged between 20 and 40 and normally stick at the game from three to five years. If you stick with the job, your physical capability will

improve dramatically.

Hunting dogs are an intricate part of the professional hunter's arsenal. The species you are engaging will ultimately dictate the type of hunting method and dog/s you must train to be effective. Good dogs are crucial and require consistent training for 6-18 months, and continued practice as a team will improve competency. It is not only about hunting ability but also about good camp and bushcraft skills.

Even though we all carry GPS

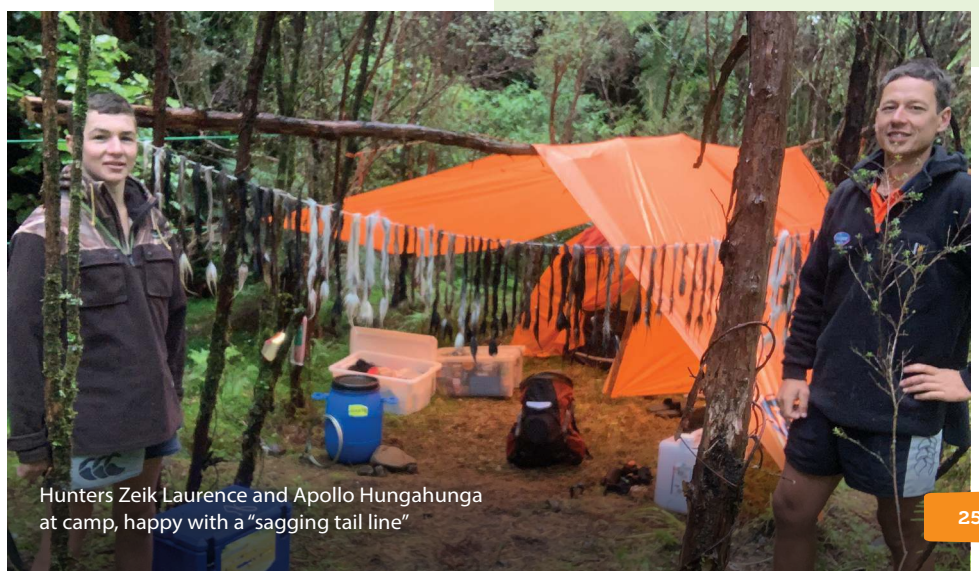
and phones with map programs I feel that the ability to navigate and route find with a map and compass is still a skill that should be mastered. Keeping a clean, tidy camp and being able to cook a satisfying meal for yourself and camp mates is also extremely important, not only for camp morale but to be able to sustain yourself through extended periods of high-intensity exercise. Hygiene standards also need to be second to none, that means a daily scrub in the creek or a bucket of water over the swede.

Reporting and accountability are now

more than ever a significant part of the operation; as a hunter you are both the eyes and ears on the ground for those paying the bills, reporting on flora and fauna that you encounter during the course of your day. Hunters' daily track logs and waypoints of kill sites and points of interest are recorded on GPS and/or operational specific phone applications.

THE DAY

A typical day on the goats normally starts between 6.30am and 7am with letting the dogs off for a run and chaining them back up. Breakfast and lunch get sorted for the day, safety schedule is sent via the Inreach, the team health and safety briefing and plan for the day confirmed with your hunting mate and pre-hunt paperwork completed. Take the day bag with compulsory safety gear, spare ammo, food, and water, along with GPS, two-way radio, and knife belt, and set off for the day. The plan usually focuses on targeting known hotspots in the block, putting the dogs in the right place to maximise the wind at different times of the day and looking at new country if time allows. We usually get back before dark (all going to plan), chain



Hunters Zeik Laurence and Apollo Hungahunga at camp, happy with a "sagging tail line"



Cam Ferguson piloting a thermal equipped drone on a wallaby surveillance and control operation



Ultimately, only experience behind the rifle, working with

the dogs on the hill and around camp life, will make you and your dogs into a good team; the old 10,000-hour rule is a good standard.

Regardless of the industry, the bar is raised to another level when you become a professional.

While I will not go into specifics, look to the experienced people in the crew for what gear works and performs best. Kit needs to be durable, easy to use and maintain and have a good warranty; trust me, it is far easier and more cost-effective to get the correct gear from the start.

Regarding rifle calibres, you need to be able to source large amounts of ammunition, as reloading is not a viable option when a team is going through 15,000-20,000 rounds a year depending on the types of operations to be delivered. While I advocate for the 222,

it means sticking with primarily .223 and .308 - special long-range calibres are used on an 'as and when required' basis.

Advancements in technology such as GPS tracking, thermal optics, drones, and satellite communication have greatly improved the safety, effectiveness and efficiency of ungulate control. For the contract principal or employer, there are a lot of operational requirements to complete. Operational plans, landowner engagement, ongoing regulatory requirements, control, and post operational reporting and debrief to complete. Enjoy the hunter's role if an opportunity presents itself.

It is a great career to more or less be your own boss, travel the country, forge long-lasting relationships with the hunters you work with, develop your hunting skills and dogs to be able to deliver the goods and is a job I still love.

Cheers and hot barrels
jhart@bcl.kiwi



the dogs up, give them a feed, and ensure water containers are full. Time for a scrub and then get dinner on. Complete the kill sheets, send the evening schedules, get the electronics on charge, have dinner, do the dishes, hit the scratcher, sleep, and repeat. Depending on the species you are targeting, the hours of work will vary. For instance, if you are targeting deer, you will need to start earlier and finish later. Night shooting requires a start half an hour before dark and may continue through to the early hours of the morning or daylight, depending on the habits of the animals. Night shooting is fairly taxing and you have to make sure you get decent sleep during the day. Drone operations take a bit more planning and compliance, especially when operating under Part 102 regulations.



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OUT THERE DOING IT



You'll Know It When You See It

WRITTEN BY ~ RYAN MCNAB



The main basin we hunted in, photographed on Worm's Pentax MZ50.
The big buck was shot just to the left of the bigger waterfall

When late December swings around and most people are planning holidays and boozing trips, the thought of a big summer-coat chamois buck always seems to drift into my mind

For some reason, these little animals are my favourite to hunt. Having targeted a big one for several years and never quite managing to make it into the "10 Inch" club, it was high on my list of things to tick off

My best effort so far was a very old West Coast doe that I had seen in 2021 with a kid in tow, and then in the same spot in 2022. She was barren that year so decided to take her, and just in time, as judging by the amount of horn rot she had I don't think it would have been long before she lost them. She went 10 1/4 on the good side and 9 3/4 on the other. After getting close to the magic number a few times, I was hesitant to shoot unless I found a chamois that was definitely in double digits and had been on multiple hunting trips without finding "the one." Having hunted this block during the ballot period earlier in the year and with three of the party members getting chamois rather than deer, I had an idea of where animals might be. One chamois buck taken on our roar trip measured 10 1/2 inches and was

one of the boys' first ever bucks. Given the remoteness of this area, I had a theory that there had to be another big old boy in there somewhere. The hunt was on.

Day 1

For this trip, I recruited a good mate I've known for years by the name of Wormbag (Justin Anderson), and he brought along his film camera, a Pentax MZ50. We left my house at 4am on Boxing Day with an early flight up to "spot X", followed by a good walk upstream and up another side creek to where we planned to camp and hunt for the next four days. We were dropped off at 9.15 am and started our trek upriver. I quickly resigned myself to the thought of wet boots for the whole trip as within five minutes we were almost up to our

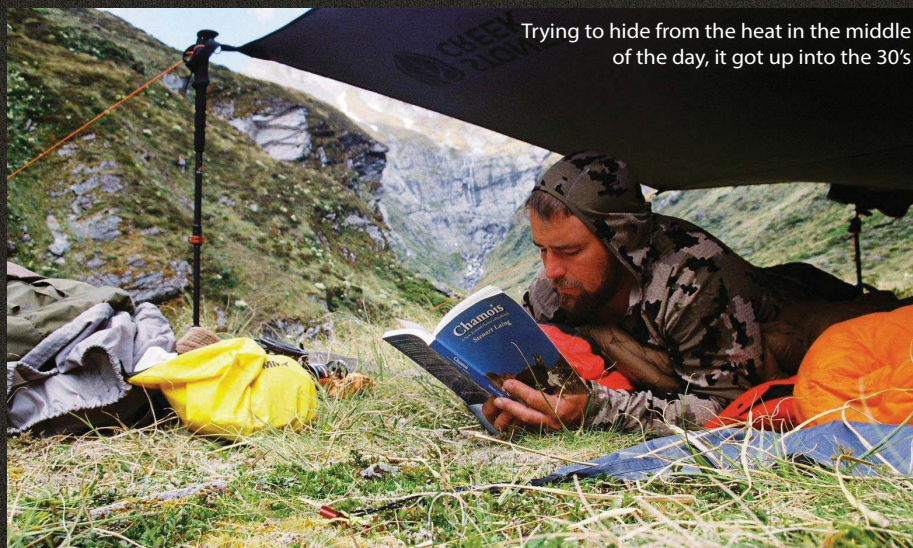
waist while crossing the river. Three or four hours into it we had gained some height and started to get a better view above the bush line and onto terraces on the opposite face. Straight away we spotted a couple of mobs of nannies with newly born kids which perked us up for the remainder of our walk. We would walk for 30 minutes, then stop and glass and spot more animals. This suited me nicely as Wormbag is built like a mountain goat while I'm more like a block of butter. I was thankful for the regular breaks; one o'clock in the afternoon in late December is not the ideal time of year for a walk up a steep hill.

Just as we hit the flat where we planned to camp, we spooked a nice buck 70 or so metres uphill. Quick-smart we threw the spotting scope on him, and guessed him to be just shy of the magic number, so watched him for ten minutes then carried on up to find our campsite.

Six hours after leaving the helicopter we had camp set up at the start of the large basin where we planned to hunt for the next few days.

Day 2

Wet boots on at five the next morning and a heavy dew quickly had us both wide awake. Clear skies



Trying to hide from the heat in the middle of the day, it got up into the 30's

After watching him for ten minutes and talking ourselves out of making a stalk on him, we carried on our way only to spook another lone buck 600 metres away right in the head of the valley. This was a nice buck with thick bases and good curl and height. His body looked larger and ticked all the boxes. Unfortunately, he must have caught our wind and kept moving steadily up over a saddle and headed for the West Coast. This proved to be our good fortune as you will soon read.

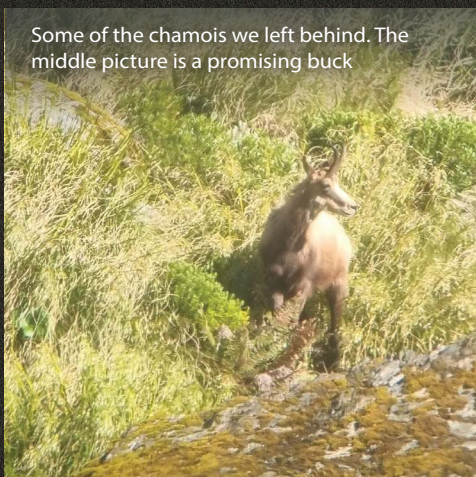
These distracting shenanigans had drawn the out morning and by the time we got up the side creek the sun was up. Things were heating up so we parked up for a few hours and got on the binos. That is to say, I did, with Wormbag catching some Z's while I kept watch. We only saw one animal up the side creek with a single horn and too high up for my sappy legs to carry me that day. I spent a decent amount of time watching the mob of immature bucks above our campsite, and I now noticed a different looking chamois amongst them. I took a few quick photos of this new animal and a couple of videos and didn't think too much more of it as it was a long way off and hard to make out the size of its horns through the spotting scope. I noticed that it was chasing the younger bucks around bullying them a bit, and concluded it was

looked like it would be a pearler of a day. We packed up our gear and moved upstream, glassing faces as we went. As we rounded a corner, we spotted a mob of bucks up on a face a few hundred metres away. **A quick look with the spotting scope confirmed that they were all younger animals, but still very entertaining to watch.** From then on, we didn't have much choice but to walk in full view of this mob of young bucks to get to where we planned to camp that night. To our surprise, they

couldn't have cared less about us setting up camp 300 odd metres away, and carried on grazing and playing.

I had planned to hunt a large side creek accessible from this campsite, so we took a day pack and headed in that direction. We hadn't gone 200 metres when we spotted a decent buck by himself on a face. This one was very close to being big enough to warrant me taking him, but I'd always thought that when I finally spot a 10-inch buck, I would know straight away and as this one was 50/50, he walked on.

Some of the chamois we left behind. The middle picture is a promising buck



an old barren doe, as I could see a lot of height on its horns but not a whole lot of hook back. By this stage it was too warm with temperatures heading for 30°C in the middle of the day, and most animals were disappearing back to bed down in the shade. We shot back to camp for a swim, relaxing for a couple of hours, and preparing for the evening.

Later in the day, it was decided Wormbag would head up over the saddle on the main divide in pursuit of the good buck we had spooked earlier, and I would go up the face above camp to try get a look at the 'old barren doe' and maybe get some good photos and footage of the younger animals.

I stalked in to 50-odd metres on the group of young bucks and spotted a few other animals in the neighbourhood, but couldn't locate the animal I was looking for.

Wormbag failed to catch up with the buck and lost his sun hat, leaving him looking like a beetroot upon his return after an afternoon in the sun. We had a quick wash and hit the hay. A good tip when summer hunting is to leave a bottle of water out in the sun ready for when you get back to camp at night. You can mix it with some cold water and have a wash, so as not to smell like a yeti when you get into bed.

Overnight we reviewed some of the photos and videos from the day and had an exciting moment when looking at the video I had taken of the old doe bullying the young bucks. There was a single frame where the pixels lined up and showed two immensely high horns with fat bases and a lot of width. This so-called 'old barren doe' had potentially changed into the biggest chamois I'd ever seen in my life. I spent that night wondering if I had stuffed it up by not paying closer attention through the spotting scope that morning or not looking more closely at the footage. It was certainly in a huntable position when I had been filming it from 1500 metres away. The new aim of the game for day three was locate that animal and have a closer look.

Day 3

We were up early, keen to get some binos up and see if that animal was back, prowling round the younger animals above us. There was a good rock to glass from near camp, so we wrapped up in puffer jackets and took rifles to get set up right on first light. I mentioned to Worm "what do you reckon the chances of that buck we spooked yesterday over to the coast being back on that face over there" so the binos went up, and straight away we saw a lone chamois



in the exact same spot. We put the spotter on him, and could hardly believe it, but it was the big animal we had been looking at in the footage. He'd gone right past our camp, made his way up to the head of the valley overnight, and moved in on the other bucks bedding spot. The stalk was on. Wind was swirling a bit and we were quite exposed as we moved closer, but luckily he was very focused on thrashing scrub and was moving in and out of a wee gut where he couldn't see us.

We travelled in intervals while he wasn't watching and closed the gap to 500 metres. It was close enough for a shot, but was better to get closer. With a bit of wind, a longer shot could be risky. He looked our way and caught our movement, so the rifle and spotting scope were set up in case he spooked. Worm was on the spotting scope to watch for where the shot hit, and I was on the rifle. We were set up and thinking he was settling back down when Worm's camera, in a bright red dry bag, took

off down the hill. With no thoughts of spooking the biggest buck I'd ever seen Worm was bounding down after it like a wounded gazelle. **I swear through the rifle scope I saw a perplexed look on the chamois' face at what it witnessed.** He must've concluded that these fools surely weren't after him because 30 minutes or so later he was asleep, so Worm made his way back up to me and we carried on our stalk. With him bedded down sleeping we were out of sight and were able to close that gap to 160 metres and to set up. After a bit of noisy encouragement, he woke up and stood up, making it clear to see that this animal was the one I had been waiting for. I always thought that when I would see a 10-inch chamois, I would know, and I didn't need a second look at this one. I took the shot.

He was in a precarious spot, high on a face with a vertical waterfall ten yards to one side and bluffs ten yards on the other. Luckily, a 162-grain pill made sure he wasn't moving too far. Much to my



Our campsite after a good walk

dismay, when down he gave one final kick which slid him free from the scrub and he started sliding, gaining speed ridiculously quickly on the dry summer tussock. About 50 metres downhill from him was a four to five metre bluff. He flew off the drop at a hell of a rate of knots and disappeared out of sight. I was borderline pulling my hair out watching this happen thinking those hooks wouldn't be in one piece, and we were on for a day searching for shards of chamois horn.

We found him about ten yards from the riverbed, upside down with hooks out of sight.

Reaching over I could feel one horn still there and gave him a tug. I was speechless when the other horn came free from the tussock, and we could have a closer look at the length and age of this creature. Even sitting there with the animal right in front of us, I still had to check between its back legs to find out whether it was a doe with really thick bases or a buck with not much hook. The variation between these animals is amazing and I was wrong with my initial judgement and pleased to see a pair of gonads in back. He was moulting a lot and unfortunately the skin was in poor condition,, so I decided to leave it behind. You could feel every one of his ribs and

any fat he did have was yellow, indicating a fair amount of stress on him in his old age. I doubt he would've made it through his next winter, maybe not even until then.

On the walk back to camp for brekkie and a measure up we both guessed his size. We had concluded that his hooks were 10 ½ inches or so. It was a bit of a shock when they both measured just over 11 inches with 3 ¾-inch bases and of an unusual shape. They are very wide and tall with not a whole lot of curl. The stack of age rings on the base of the horns was something to marvel at. His teeth were worn almost all the way down, and he looked as though he had been having a rough time with life at that age living up on the main divide. **It truly is a buck of a lifetime for me and makes me thankful to any other hunters who might have seen this animal in his younger days and decided to let him grow.**

The next aim of the trip for Worm was to secure either a mature buck or a dry doe for meat and to move back down to the main riverbed as weather was meant to blow in either late that night or the next day. That evening, we moved

back down to where we camped the first night and managed to pick up a barren doe for Worm to load his pack up with meat destined for jerky. We never caught up with the other buck we had seen on the second evening so he's still up there growing for another day. With cloud blowing over from the West Coast and the area we were camped in a bit spooked up we decided to make the two-hour trek back down to the main riverbed. At least then if the weather came in, we would be in a handy spot to walk out in the rain. We were down at about 8.15pm and keen for some sleep.

Day 4

Next morning we tidied the heads up a bit and cruised around eating food and talking trash, eventually making our way down river for our chopper pickup.

While waiting for our helicopter Worm let share an interesting piece of information he had been hiding. He had forgotten to bring any toilet paper with him but on the first day had found eight precious squares on our way past a hut. Somehow he managed to make that last for the other three days hunting. Very industrious in my opinion.



Worm with his barren doe destined for jerky

The buck from the story on the left and doe from 2022 on the right



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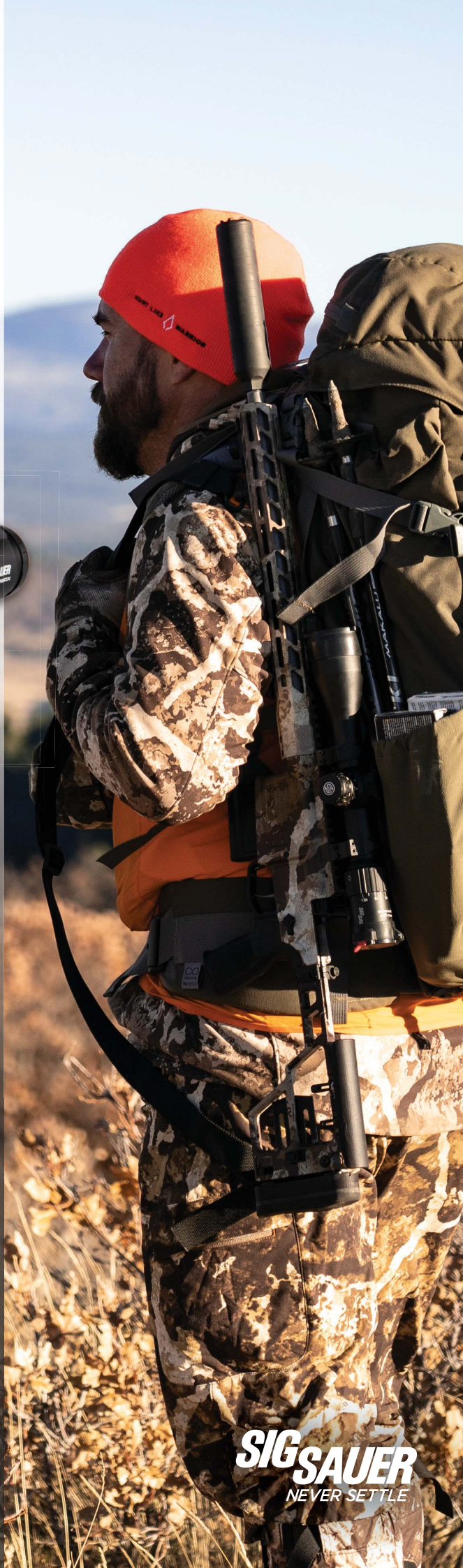
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TRIP PREPARATION THINGS A HUNTER MUST KNOW PART SIX

WRITTEN BY ~ MIKE SPRAY

Planning and preparation, along with your acquired experience, knowledge and skills are essential for safe backcountry travel

There are many aspects relevant to planning and preparing for a hunting trip. These include, but are not limited to, weather, camping, navigation, river crossings, clothing, food and equipment, and emergencies preparedness.

Specific considerations for these may well differ significantly depending on whether your hunting trip is below or above the bush line where the environments and terrain are very different.

Do not underestimate the importance of a dedicated pre-trip planning and preparation phase, as this is the key to having a safe and successful hunting trip. **Your considerations should include the purpose of your trip, your fitness, equipment, and that your skills and experience match the environment and terrain you plan to travel.** If they don't, consider tagging along with a more experienced party first. Do not forget that once you establish

your trip plan pass on your intentions to another person; that way if you do not return as planned, they can alert emergency services.

Begin to monitor long range weather forecasts early. The weather forecast may well influence a change in plans before departure. Heavy rain or inclement mountain weather forecasts signal a warning, especially if you have rivers to cross or mountain passes to navigate.

Several smartphone weather apps can be used both before and during your trip. MetService, Windy and YR apps provide up-to-date and reliable forecasts. If you cannot access the internet when in the back country, you may have to rely on your ability to observe and interpret weather from the ground. Monitoring wind direction and strength and cloud patterns all help predict a change in the weather. It is necessary to know how to interpret a weather map and predict weather changes from your observations. Weather updates can be accessed through the Garmin InReach communication device

but be aware that electronic devices can fail and your backup weather observation and interpretation skills may be needed.

An important aspect of pre-trip planning is route planning. Access into the backcountry is generally planned using defined routes such as marked tracks, river valleys, prominent spurs, ridges and from time to time, compass bearings. It is a good idea to talk to others who are familiar with the area you intend to go into. Their local knowledge can be invaluable when planning your route. Obtain a map of the area and study it before you go. Identify potential camping spots, river crossing points, off-track handrails (easily followed features such as a stream), hunting areas and emergency egress points. If you are accessing the high country where snow and ice may be encountered, ensure you have had the appropriate training and the equipment for these conditions.

You can search for potential campsites on your map based on travel distance and time, water availability and the hunting area you are accessing. When selecting a campsite ensure it is well drained and above the flood line should you be near a river. Try and select an area which is sheltered from the wind. Ensure your



When camping, do not overlook camp etiquette. Nothing is worse than entering a remote campsite and finding evidence of cut vegetation, rubbish left behind, a smouldering fire or toileting

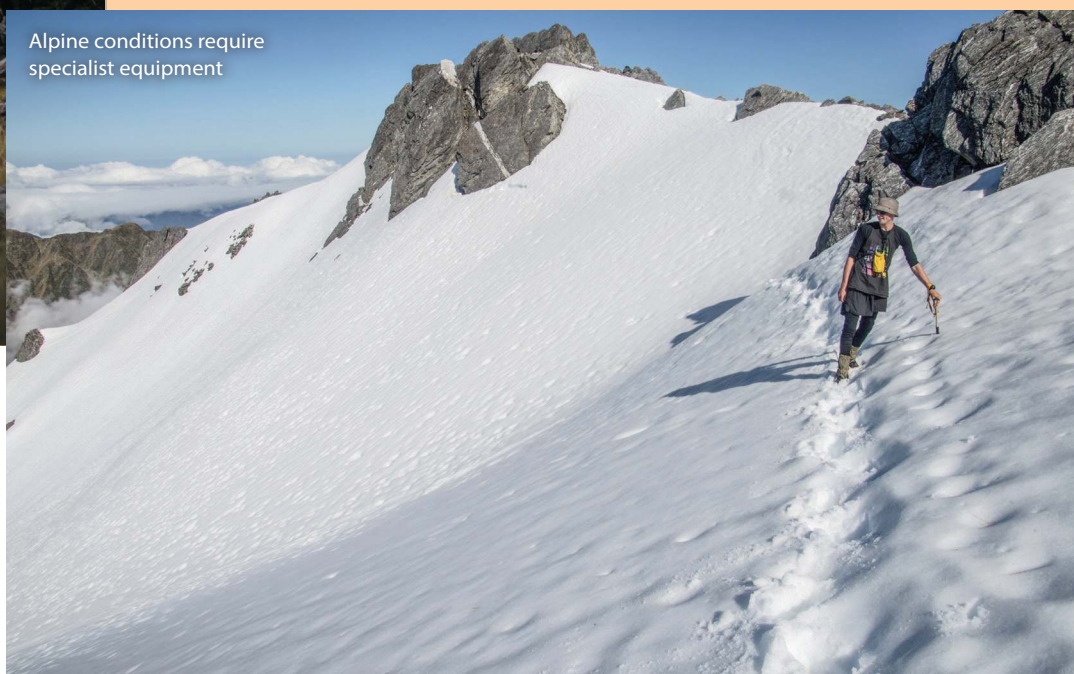
campsite is downwind of your hunting area so as not to alarm nearby animals with your scent. Be aware of camping near or under dead or rotting trees where branches may fall - particularly when a strong wind blows. In the high country, rockfall and avalanches can pose additional risk so make sure your camp is not in the pathway of either.

When camping, do not overlook camp etiquette. Nothing is worse than entering a remote campsite and finding evidence of cut vegetation, rubbish left behind, a smouldering fire or toileting. The DOC 'Environmental Care Code' requires everyone accessing the backcountry to respect the environment and others by protecting our native plants and animals, burying our toilet waste and removing our rubbish. We are expected to keep our waterways clean, take care with fires and to respect our cultural heritage. Complying with all parts of this code will go a long way in ensuring the positive reputation of hunters.

When selecting clothing for your hunting trip consider the following principles. Select garments that can cope with cold and hot conditions, that are light and



A campsite above the bushline requires different preparation to a bush camp



Alpine conditions require specialist equipment

can be removed and added easily as necessary. Adopt the layering principle, which traps warm air between the layers of clothing, allowing you to adjust your temperature. The more layers, the warmer you will be, and if you overheat you can remove layers. Select specific materials to provide warmth and protection. Merino wool and synthetic materials such as polypropylene will provide warmth while wicking moisture away. Breathable Gore-Tex products will work well to protect you from rain and wind. **Consider taking a minimum of three layers - made up of a base layer, mid layer, and outer layer.** Many outer layers come in a camouflage pattern, which can help break up your outline and contrast, so you are not easily identified by the game animals you are hunting.

Even in the middle of summer,

New Zealand's weather can change unexpectedly with cold and wet southerly conditions prevailing. Ensure you are prepared for this by including longs, over trousers, gloves and a warm beanie in your clothing bag. **A beanie will protect your head from excessive heat loss and is essential headwear in cold weather.** Take spare warm and dry clothing for nighttime and for emergencies. Avoid cotton clothing as cotton does not keep you warm, and if wet, it will make you feel cold, and it is very difficult to dry. When it comes to socks, choose a product that is either synthetic or wool or a mixture of both, that are well-fitting, comfortable and durable.

Suitable, well-fitting boots provide the support and protection required for New Zealand's rugged hunting environments.

Two hunters' worth of gear drying
in some rare Fiordland weather



Hunting boots for bush environments will differ from those appropriate for the mountains. Choose your boots to suit the environment you are hunting. **To avoid the discomfort of blisters, make sure to wear in a new pair of boots by wearing them around the home or go for some walks on easy tracks.**

Your boots should usually be about half a size bigger than your shoe size to accommodate thicker socks that provide additional comfort and warmth.

Preparing a well-thought-out food menu is an essential part of trip planning. Food is your fuel and the food you select needs to provide you with the energy needed for those long days of hunting. Proteins, carbohydrates and fats provide energy in different ways. Proteins repair muscle tissue and include meat, cheese, milk powder, nuts and grains. Carbohydrates

provide instant energy and include sugar, honey, bread, pasta and dried fruits. Fats have the highest and longer lasting energy per gram and include butter, bacon, salami and chocolate. Food for multi-day trips needs to be lightweight and nutritious. There are dehydrated products available that are lightweight and can be prepared by boiling water. Do not forget to include snacks and emergency rations in your food menu.

Drinking water is essential when hunting. If you do not drink regularly, dehydration can become a serious issue.

In most hunting environments in New Zealand, water is readily available, but not always, and it is wise to carry water, especially in alpine environments. It is also wise to top up your water bottle at every opportunity. Hydration bladder and hose systems are

ideal for carrying water and enabling regular hydration.

It is important to carry the appropriate equipment to ensure you will have a safe and enjoyable hunting trip. Select your equipment carefully, giving due regard to its purpose, suitability, durability and the environment you are hunting. **As with any equipment you get what you pay for, and it pays to kit yourself with reliable equipment that will handle the adverse conditions often encountered when camping and hunting in the backcountry.** Talk to other hunters and notice what gear they use and why they use it. This information is incredibly valuable when you are looking at buying or replacing hunting equipment. Do not forget to include emergency equipment, a survival kit, first aid kit and emergency communications with your gear.

Planning and preparing well before you head off into the backcountry will ensure you have a safe and successful hunting trip. Neglecting this important phase could result in things not going well for you, or even worse, endangering your life.

The following lists will help prompt you when it comes to planning your trip. **A list will ensure you do not overlook taking an essential article of clothing or item of equipment.**



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MIKE'S BASIC GEAR LIST

CLOTHING	EQUIPMENT	SURVIVAL KIT	HUNTING KIT
Boots	Pack & pack liner	Matches / lighter	Day pack
Socks	Hunting kit	Fire starters / (e.g., rubber)	Hi-vis vest
Gaiters	Head torch (spare batteries)	Torch	Firearm/bolt/magazine
Shorts	Navigation equipment	Whistle	Ammunition
Undergarments	Toiletries (toilet paper)	Shelter (fly, bivy or survival bag)	Rangefinder
Thermal top and bottoms	Communication devices	Emergency food	Binoculars/spotting scope
Long trousers and leggings	Sleeping bag and mat	Signalling equipment (e.g., mirror)	Knife and sharpener
Long fleece top	Tent or tent fly (if camping)	Knife or multitool	GPS & spare batteries
Waterproof jacket	Cooking stove/lighter	Cord	Map and compass
Hat/beanie/balaclava	Stove fuel	Pencil and paper	Camera/smartphone
Gloves/mittens	Cooking pot/pan		Water bottle
Camp footwear	Cutlery and bowl/mug		First aid kit
Sunglasses (for alpine)	Sunscreen / insect repellent		Survival kit/ Emergency food
Hat	Plastic bags		
Spare dry clothing	Water bottle		
	Survival kit		
	First aid kit		

FOOD

Breakfast

Muesli, oats or cereal

Milk powder

Dehydrated or ready to eat breakfast

Up & Go liquid breakfast

Bacon

Lunch

Bread/wraps/crackers

Butter/margarine

Cheese

Salami

Tuna

Dinner

Dehydrated or ready to eat meal

Rice/instant mash potato/dehydrated vegetables

Instant soup

Instant noodles/pasta

Salt

Snacks

Scroggin/chocolate

Muesli or fruit bars

Dehydrated fruit and meat

Drinks

Tea/coffee/milo

Milk powder/sugar

Powdered sports drinks/electrolytes

Water

Emergencies

One Square Meal bars

Dehydrated meals

Muesli bars, dried fruits, or nuts

Instant noodles

Don't forget to be realistic with your pack weights and to train before big trips, your time will be more enjoyable

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Packrafting the Poulter

WRITTEN BY
MITCH THORN
@SOUTHISLANDRIFLEWALKERS

Boredom fuels good ideas. Last November, my mate Raddy and I were seeking shelter in a small two-man biv in the Arthurs Pass region

During the last few hours of the hike, the weather had really packed in; we were a couple of drowned rats by the time we made it to Ranger Biv. Upon arrival, we were underwhelmed, as it wasn't in great nick. A leaky roof had led to pools of yellow-tinted water on rubber mattress toppers stretched between rotting boards. An old poem was written on the wall suggesting that the local mouse population may have contributed to the yellow tinge. One of the beds was crammed under the other, providing just enough room to slip a bedroll underneath - there would be no rolling around in the night for the unlucky loser of paper scissors rock. The open fireplace gave the biv a nice indoor-outdoor flow, letting in enough wind and rain to remind us of the outside world. Our soaked gear was stacked in the corner, leaving us just enough room to hunch uncomfortably. Despite all that, we were thankful to have a roof over our heads and protection from the downpour outside. That's when the true value of the shelter became apparent, and its issues became its quirks. Who else had sought shelter in this place? What stories does it hold in its rotting walls? (Since then, the BCT has done a lot of work, and by all

accounts it's a much more welcoming shelter! It will be finished in March 2024). The next 18 hours were spent shuffling around, trying to discover the most comfortable way to wait out a storm which never cleared. During this exercise of patience, we spent a lot of time exploring the area around us through our topo maps.

There was something about the biv that left us wanting more. You could tell it had a rich history and must have offered refuge to plenty of adventurers before us. Our time studying the maps left us itching to explore the harder-to-reach corners of Arthurs Pass and check out these slices of history before they suffer the same fate as Thompson Biv. On most of our trips our primary goal is hunting, but the area is now known to offer fairly slim pickings in terms of deer. The surrounding valleys are a stronghold for the last few hundred orange-fronted parakeets, so much conservation effort is put in to keeping out unwanted pests. As a result, we wanted to plan our expeditions into these areas with a different aim; bring the rifles along for the walk but focus on the adventure.

I love the idea of a point A to point B trip, as you don't end up walking through the same area twice, and you

get the most bang for your buck in terms of exploring. The only issue is the extra level of planning required: do you drop a vehicle at the other end? ask someone to pick you up? or even try your hand at hitchhiking? Raddy had a pretty good track record of that during his Te Araroa walk. Crossing the main divide is another tick in the box when considering an adventure. It adds a level of excitement and makes the adventure feel bigger. It's probably just a mental factor; on paper it sounds a lot more exciting, but the reality is that there are plenty of well-travelled routes from East to West and vice versa. We'd heard of people packrafting the Poulter River which opened up the possibilities of what we might achieve in a weekend trip and added an element of excitement to our expedition. With all these ideas coming together, we devised a plan for checking out Minchin Bivouac. All we needed was a long weekend and a lucky run of weather.

ANZAC weekend rolled around, and to sweeten the deal, I managed to take a day off work, giving us four days to follow our route. We had had our roar-hunting fix earlier in the month, so it was a good time to dedicate a trip to adventure. We dropped a car off at the Mount White end of the Poulter and then drove through Arthurs Pass to Aitkens Corner. Our forecast wasn't great, but it was good enough. The first weather hurdle happened before our trip even began; we arrived to a swollen Otira River caused by a deluge the previous day. Thankfully, we had the packrafts handy to ferry us across. It was slightly frustrating, but it beat the alternatives: a two-hour detour route over the Deception Valley bridge or

risking a waist-deep crossing in a brown, pumping river. If it wasn't for a quick paddle on Lake Browning a few months earlier, it would've been a very underwhelming first time in a packraft.

With the added admin behind us we set off up the Taramakau Valley to our first night's accommodation - Townsend Hut. It's about a five-hour hike from Aitkens Corner and requires a couple of river crossings - the main two being the Otira and the Otehake. After a few hours up the flats an old cut track leads up an unnamed creek, then veers off into the bush for a steep ascent to the tops. We arrived a couple of hours after dark, feeling fantastic that the biggest day was behind us. Nestled just above the bush line, Townsend hut boasts an incredible view back down the valley towards the West Coast. We had the pleasure of waking up to this view as the rising sun lit up the peaks across the Taramakau.

Knowing this was likely our best chance to find a stag, we set off early and glassed the surrounding bushline on our way up to the summit but were disappointed. From what we'd read online there are a few different routes to get through Minchin Pass. The most used route seems to be up Townsend Creek, and there are helpful articles online that detail the trip. Another way is by sidling around the tops on the Taramakau side from

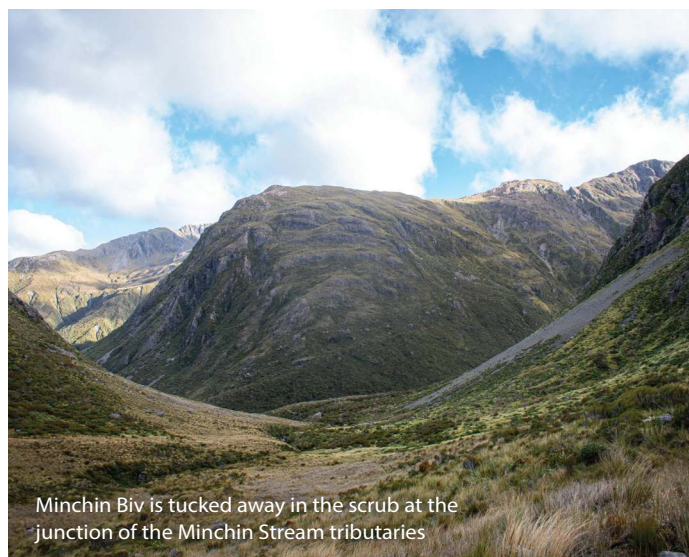
Townsend Hut towards the pass. The route we decided to follow was over the high point 1731 above Townsend Hut. The climb's not too difficult, and the view when cresting the main divide was well worth the effort. We spotted a few chamois on our way up, but nothing worth going after.

The landscape up there is incredible. Huge, exposed cliffs shear off the divide, leading down to the tussock-filled basins below. Large screes of crumbly torlesse greywacke feed down into the streams that weave their way down-valley. Way off in the distance, we could see where we'd left Raddy's truck, a daunting reminder of how much country we still had to cover. Back behind us, we could see across the Taramakau and over the jagged tops to the north, peeking through a layer of low cloud. We would've sat there for hours if not for the gale which had been building all morning and was still picking up.

From here our route took us down the ridge on the true right of the tarn-filled basin above Minchin Pass. Our leisurely hike was now a race to the biv and out of the nor'west which was trying to ruin our day. Raddy was quick to open a gap between us as he stormed off ahead with the rifle on his pack. As you'd expect, I spotted a nice chamois buck beneath us,



Looking downstream from Minchin Biv



Minchin Biv is tucked away in the scrub at the junction of the Minchin Stream tributaries



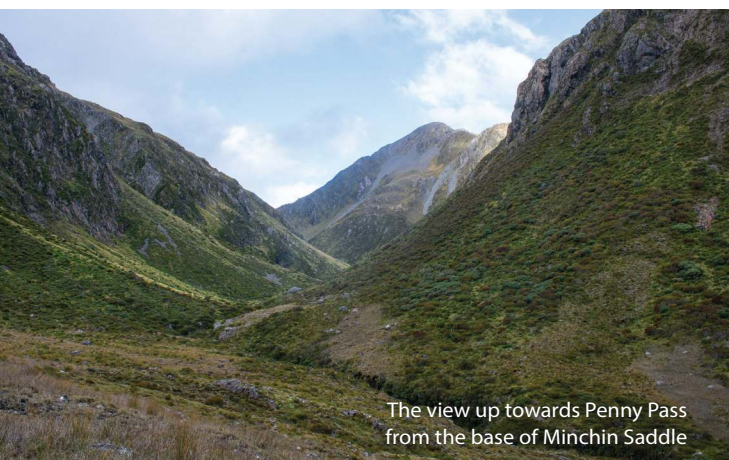
Raddy making his way up to the main divide



The view down valley from Townsend Hut



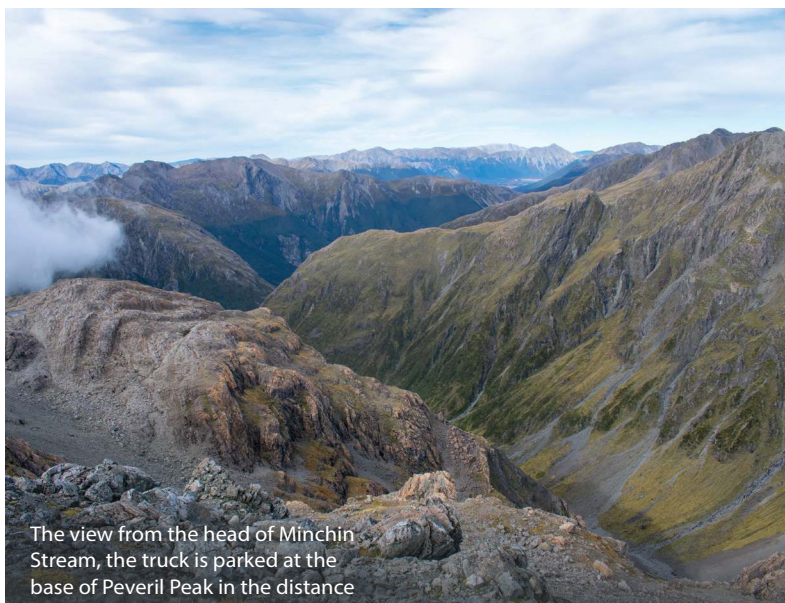
The view from the main divide, Mount Elizabeth poking through the distant clag



The view up towards Penny Pass from the base of Minchin Saddle



The chamois we had to leave



The view from the head of Minchin Stream, the truck is parked at the base of Peveril Peak in the distance

it in all honesty we'd had about enough punishment from the wind. I wasn't convinced that he'd crack the 10-inch mark either.

The wind was absolutely ripping through the pass as we dropped off the tops down to Minchin Biv. **It was frustrating being in such an incredible piece of country and not able to take it all in.** Instead, we were at the mercy of the weather and getting just a taste of how unforgiving these remote places can be. That's when these little bivs are truly worth their

our behalf - there were no mattresses - and our bedrolls were still sitting at home in the 'nah we won't need that' pile.

The next day we carried on down the valley to Lake Minchin, our next point of interest for the trip.

Raddy had carried a small fishing rod and a spinner; we were determined to catch ourselves some dinner. On our trip to Ranger Biv we spoke to a trumper who'd fished the lake and had great success. He assured us how easy it was by describing his fishing ability to us - "It's been that long since I've fished, I forgot I had to flip that metal thing over before casting" whilst pointing to his bail arm. With that in mind we knew we would catch an absolute feast, and could already taste the fresh fish! Our experience was completely opposite to what we expected. After about two hours of casting in the pouring rain without even managing a bite, we spat the dummy and carried on down valley. **The hunter gatherer side of our trip was an absolute flop, but luckily we'd planned for failure and had a spare Go Native each.**

We checked out Worsley Biv before heading back to spend the night at Poulter Hut. The couple with whom we shared the hut had the fire roaring, which was a welcome treat after a few cold days in the wind. Usually at this point in a hunt

just as Raddy was out of earshot. I tried yelling out, but the man was on a mission; **the wind was that bloody loud I don't think he would've been able to hear me from 20 metres away.** By the time I caught up the chamois had fed off, and although we could've turned back for

weight in gold. As we arrived the rain started to fall, and we quickly piled into our home for the night. Much to our delight, it was in great condition, a stark contrast to Ranger Biv's state when we were there. The only complaint we could muster was due to a lack of planning on



Townsend Hut is a hard one to miss



Views like this are why you can't beat a hut on the tops



A brief gap in the rain whilst attempting to fish...

I'd be gutted; we were going home the next day and, without sugarcoating it, our hunting was a failure. However, our last day was the most anticipated one of the trip - it was time to go rafting. As a first timer, I was in equal parts excited and nervous. I had no idea what I was getting myself in for; Raddy has done a fair bit of rafting so I was relying on his judgment for the trip. He's definitely a 'she'll be right' sort of fella so I was expecting a challenging day.

My inexperience showed before we even started rafting. I'd hired a raft off Hugh from Blue Duck Packrafts. It was a new experimental self-bailing model that "should float" I was assured. After loading half my gear into the air compartments of the raft and tying my pack on the back, I put it in the river ready to hop in. Immediately, it started filling with water, sending me into an absolute panic. Raddy couldn't help but laugh as it was just the self-bailing scuppers doing their thing. We hopped on the water about two kilometres upstream of Casey Hut. It was bony to begin with and required a few portages before finding a consistent flow.

After the first few rapids, I looked behind me to see my pack half off the raft getting dragged through the water.

All I could think about was all my camera gear inside their two layers of dry bags... but no point checking it now. With the packraft I hired you're supposed to put all your gear into the air compartments to keep it dry and out of the way. I don't think it was designed for the amount of gear we bring on these multi-day filming trips. We retied my pack on the front in the footwell, leaving my legs either dangling out the side or propped up on the sides of the raft.



Despite the rainy start to the day we were chuffed to be here

Thank God we tied the pack on when we did. About 100 metres downstream we came across more serious rapids - they'd be nothing for someone with a bit of experience, but they had me working. I knew I was in for it when I saw Raddy turn around to watch me at the other end of them - what was I about to paddle through? Earlier in the day, he advised me to pick a line early and commit, so I took that advice by following him wherever he went. As I came through the rapid, there was a large rock about twice the size of my raft in the middle of the river. I was packing myself as the current was sending me straight into it. I paddled my ass off and managed to avoid it by a couple of inches, but if my pack had still been dragging along behind me, I'd say I would've been in trouble. Coming out the other side, I was chuffed, adrenaline

pumping and a smile ear to ear. Not long after that, we started seeing big brown trout, easily pushing 12lbs. I saw one of them swimming through a shallow section of rapids - he was half out of the water struggling to make any ground. **Lunging out of my raft to chase him, I hoped to redeem our earlier fishing efforts with no plan on what I'd do if I actually caught up to him.** He sped up and disappeared downriver when he saw a drenched idiot giggling away chasing him down.

The rest of the raft was pretty straightforward, with the odd portage and occasional rapid that had us thinking and paddling hard when navigating through them. Apart from the persistent nor'west humming down-valley, it was an extremely fun day out. It took us about three hours to travel the 20 odd



All set up and ready to get on the water

kilometres to the truck. Compared to hiking out it was quicker, easier and way more enjoyable.

A FEW TAKEAWAYS FROM THE TRIP

Minchin Biv is a wicked wee spot, easier to get to than we first thought, and it's in great condition.

It definitely gets a lot more foot traffic than some of the other bivs in the area.

Make sure to bring a bedroll to avoid sleeping on your life jacket.

As said a thousand times before - always keep your rifle handy, as you never know when something might pop out. Had we been beside each other when I spotted that chamois we might've gone after him.

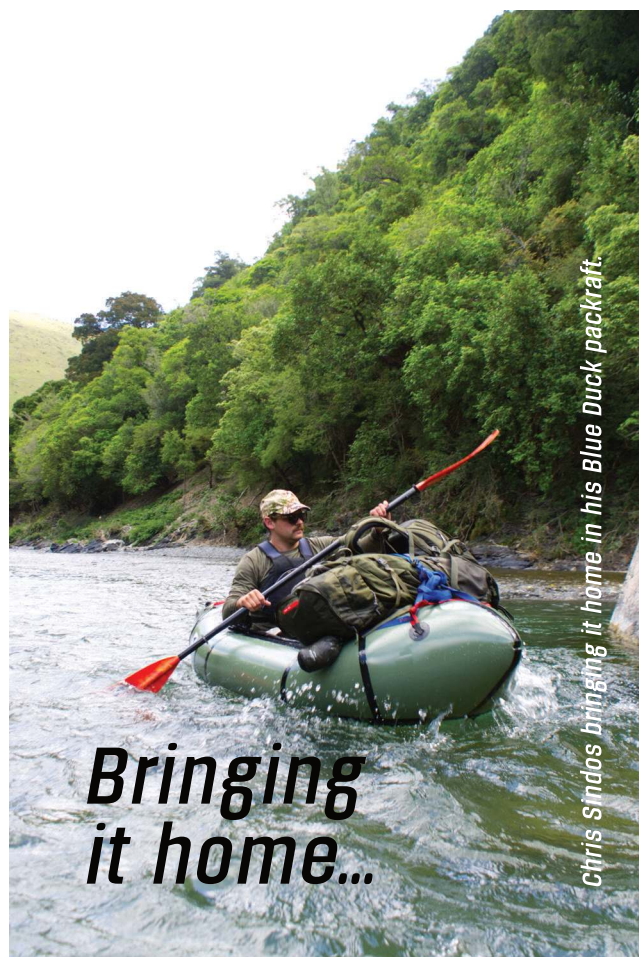
As a self-described hunting addict, my advice is to try and expand the scope of your trip to more than just

hunting. I've found that my love for hunting lies just as much in the places it takes me and the mates with whom I share the adventures as the animals I search for. This trip hammered that home, and I've come away from it just as fulfilled as I would've been with a pack full of meat.

Packrafting is a fun way to get around in the hills, and you can really cover some distance without much effort.

Even on a sunny day, it's pretty dam cold in late April, so I recommend wearing thermals and waterproof layers when rafting this late in the season.

Hugh from Blue Duck Packrafts is a bloody good bugger, and his rafts are excellent - my gear stayed bone dry inside the raft. I'd recommend packing light to be able to fit all your gear in the air compartments (or asking for a bigger raft). I took on a lot of water... the self-bailing system worked perfectly, and if it wasn't for that, I would've been underwater within the hour.



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WRITTEN BY ~ ASHTON SMITH

SUMMER CHAMOIS

With summer slowly ticking on there were minimal opportunities to get out for a pre-roar scout for potential stags. We were fresh off a successful East Coast mission for tahr and chamois, and were already itching to get back out into the mountains

The weather reporter finally gave us a window for the oncoming weekend. My older brother Corbin and I loaded up the trusty Toyota Surf and headed inland straight after work. After a stop at the local KFC for a bucket of wicked wings our spirits were high.

We reached the carpark around 9pm, using the summer night to our advantage to gain an elevation of around 300 metres, leaving us at approximately 1400 metres. We set the fly up beside a big tarn that proved to be very popular with local tourists. The serenity of camp just got us itching for the next day.

On with the frosted boots and we were set for a big day on the hoof, as far away from tourists as possible. We walked up and over the top of the head basin and into another catchment that looked very promising, but a tent was already there. After a yarn with the hunter who was fresh out of bed we decided on a plan to would go opposite ways. Luckily the way we chose, just over in the other catchment, we found a massive head basin that was going to soak up a lot of time glassing. As soon as we pulled out the glass, we spotted the first game of the trip - seven promising looking stags.



We spent a lot of time evaluating them with the spotting scope only to realise they were all still young animals with a lot of potential and most weren't even hard yet. In a couple of years, these stags would be an awesome trophy for another hunter if the choppers didn't clean them up first.

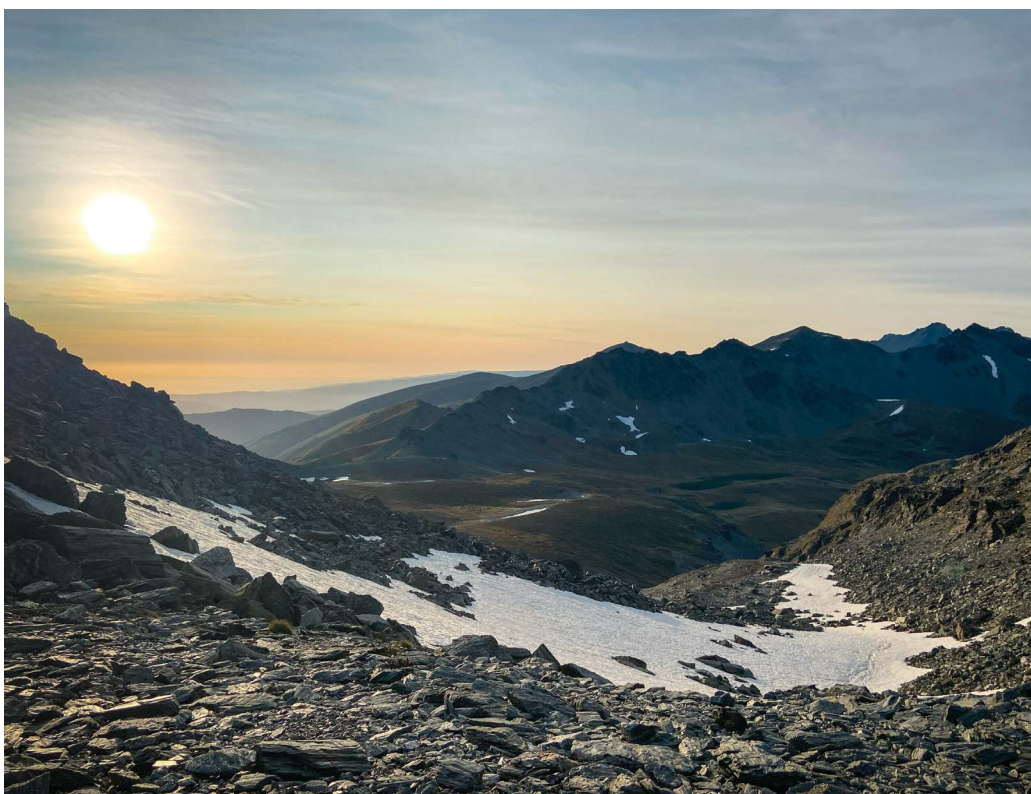
After spending a few more hours scanning the area, we had no luck. However, we knew that it was still the hottest part of the day. We decided that the further in and away from civilization we got, the more luck we would have. Looking at the GPS we found a promising-looking catchment a good few hours' slog through a couple of different valleys. It looked easy on the map but as the day went on, the boulder fields just seemed to get bigger and steeper. We kept gaining elevation and eventually reached around 2100 metres. The legs were starting to feel like jelly and the rocks really weren't doing us justice after hours of boulder hopping. We were so set on this catchment that we didn't even stop to glass on the way - our mistake, as we were likely walking past lots of game. Ya live, ya learn.

Eventually, we got just below the skyline of the catchment that was our goal, keeping low as chamois can easily spot you on the skyline. We investigated beautiful countryside with two tarns perfect for a campsite.

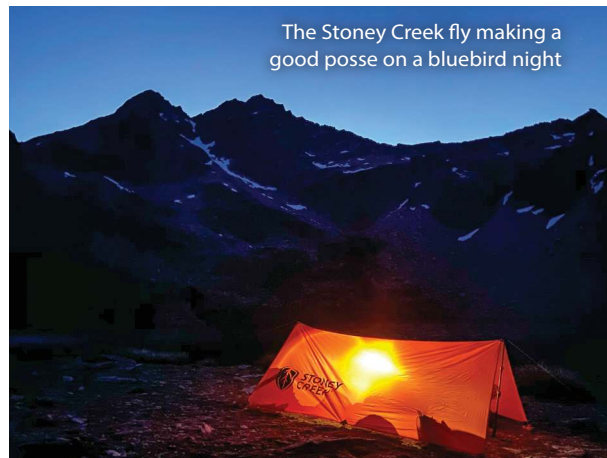
After setting up camp we were straight into glassing, but after two hours and no animals, our hopes were starting to plummet. We got under the fly for an hour to wait out the heat. I had forgotten the sunscreen the Mrs. gave me, and we were on the edge of sun stroke! At 6pm we got out to glass and straight away, down the valley on some scree, there was a family mob of chamois, all does and kids; they were



Two tarns on a plateau in the head basin



A couple of the Reds sitting out the daytime heat



The Stoney Creek fly making a good posse on a bluebird night



Hard work paid off!

safe from us. **We kept searching and what appeared to be a barren doe had started feeding its way towards us just up from the riverbed.** We spent a while evaluating, making sure it was 100% barren before we hatched a plan. Through the spotter, the horns looked over the height of its ears, but still not a monster. We decided it wouldn't be a bad second chamois for Corbin.

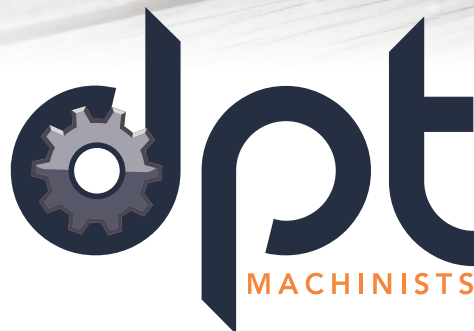
We got within 400 metres of the doe, set up the spotter, and ended up spending a good hour watching and taking photos of it. We have a lot of respect for these majestic animals and getting good photos of them almost feels better than shooting them. We decided that time was ticking on and we needed to take the shot. There was a Red hind only 20 metres in front of the chamois, with a katabatic slowly coming up behind us. **Our chances of taking a shot were starting to**

reduce as the deer would soon scent us; if that spooked then so would the chamois. Corbin snuck in closer but realised there was nowhere that provided a good sturdy rest, so he came back and set the 7mm Rem Mag up on a boulder. He made a couple of dry fires to focus in, because it's better to take your time with the shot and get it perfect than injuring the animal. Once she was broadside, it was all over. He poleaxed her at 400 metres.

We couldn't get down there fast enough! We were really hoping for a nice floor rug. She was a beautiful barren doe but still hadn't moulted properly, and it was late January! The horns weren't monstrous, coming in just under 9". To us, it was the adventure, hard work put in, and the country side that made it a really nice trophy for both of us. **She'll be straight in the pot when we get home, sorry mum!**



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TURN THE CORNER

WRITTEN BY ~ CAM MCKAY

With the constant changes to firearm licensing regulations in recent years, it is not surprising that even the police have difficulty understanding them

Health practitioners have also been involved in this confusion, especially with the rule that you can actually surrender your licence if you are having some difficulty with, for example, mental health.

We've all heard the horror scenarios of people asking for help with their mental health, only to have the police show up to remove their firearms. This can further negatively impact their recovery, and occasionally may also affect their livelihoods, due to using firearms professionally.

Turn The Corner is the brainchild of mental health advocate Glen Thurston. Earlier this year Glen completed 53 summits of Corner Peak (1300 metres of vertical) in 53 days to highlight and protest the average yearly number of 53 suicides in the New Zealand construction industry.

In 2019 Glen also became a victim of the revocation process as a result of him doing all the right things and seeking help and support from mental health services.

GT- "When my licence was revoked, sure I was angry, upset and actually went downhill even further. But a week or so into my revocation I realised that this was way more than just me losing the use of a firearm. I realised this was a barrier to seeking help, once people

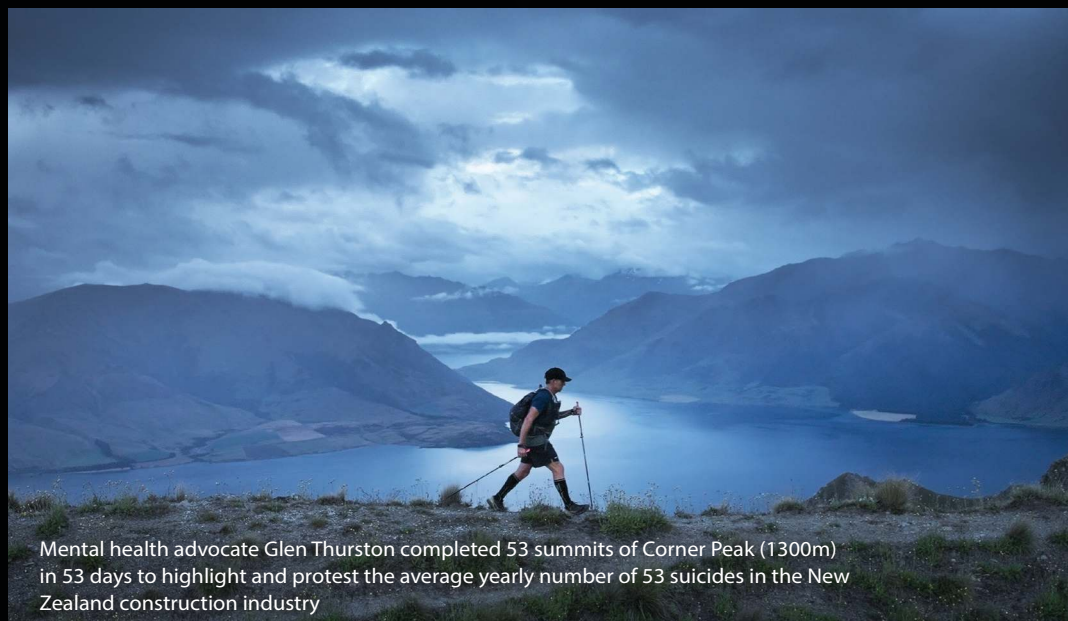
started to realise this was what could happen. Right then I decided two things. First, I was going to get my licence back! Then I was going to dedicate all of my spare time to finding answers and see how we can fix this political cock up."

The purpose of this article is to highlight that there is now a proactive way to deal with these scenarios. Currently, you can surrender your licence and store your firearms with another firearms licence holder until you have worked through whatever mental distress that got you there in the first place. If this takes longer than 30 days (which I'd imagine it will in most cases), then you would have to update the registry by

transferring the firearms to the licence holder looking after them, which is a minor hurdle.

The Firearms Safety Authority advises "If Police attend an incident relating to mental health, they may seize the firearms/licence for safekeeping until The Firearms Safety Authority have reviewed the incident and made a decision around the licence, at this point you will cease to be licensed to possess firearm, but you may still be able to shoot under direct supervision during the decision-making process".

So, what this means is that if you are proactive in recognising that you or a mate is having issues, you can



Mental health advocate Glen Thurston completed 53 summits of Corner Peak (1300m) in 53 days to highlight and protest the average yearly number of 53 suicides in the New Zealand construction industry

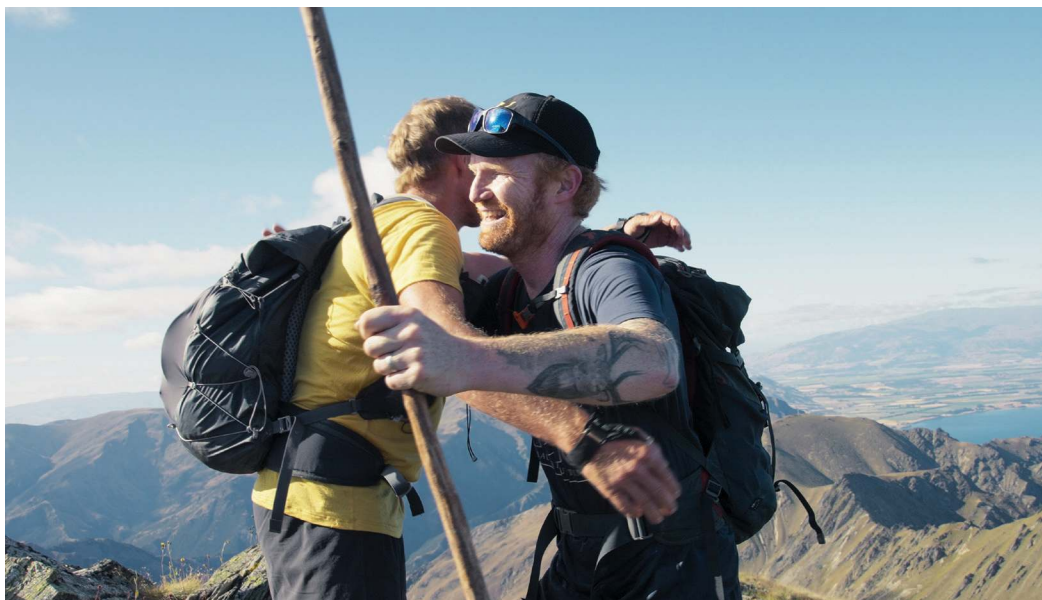
get too bad, and therefore avoid police intervention and the potential for a licence review, or revocation and a lengthy appeal process. You will still have to reapply, but it is a much simpler process and should take less than 90 days.

For many folk, going down this path will end in a much better outcome, where they can focus on getting back to full health without the added stressor of the firearms licence status being up in the air. **This also means that hunting can continue supervised by mates with the associated mental and physical benefits of being out in the hills.** This is certainly a much better outcome than the horror of your licence instantly being pulled and having the uncertainty of the review process and the potential for revocation, and the mandatory five year stand down period, where you legally cannot even touch a firearm, with or without supervision.

There is still the issue of health practitioners notifying the police of any concerns they may have around you holding a licence, and how that collides with their personal views towards firearms. The Firearms Safety Authority advises **"Health Practitioners must consider The Firearms Safety Authority if they have reason to believe their patient is a firearms licence holder and they consider the person's health condition may impact the safety of themselves or the public if they continue to have access to firearms.**

However, it is important to note that health practitioners are not the final decision makers on a person's fit and proper status to be a firearms licence holder. If health practitioners provide information to Firearms Safety Authority, it is not the only piece of information The Firearms Safety Authority can consider when deciding on someone's firearms licence status. The Firearms Safety Authority will also consider information from other sources before reaching a decision."

In my view, it's also worth noting which health professionals are bound by these washy rules. For example, a



life coach may be of great use in getting someone back on track yet, in this legislation, they are not considered to be a health professional.

At the end of the day for the above surrender suggestion to work, it requires all of us to be proactive and look out for each other. **Seeing the signs in your mates and reaching out to them could not only potentially save their life but perhaps stopped them from going down a long, dark lonely road.** Creating open discussion will help change the culture of not talking and save those struggling with acute depression by opportunity allowing them to get things off their chest and out in the open and potentially not needing medical intervention of any kind.

Glen has dedicated a huge amount of time to not only raising awareness, but also to encouraging others to get educated, just like we do with our first aid.

GT - "Let's not wait until we lose

someone we love to suicide before doing something about it. Get educated now. When someone dies from suicide, we all say we didn't see that coming. Well, of course you didn't, because how would you see the signs if you haven't done any training on how to relate and respond to someone in mental distress. "

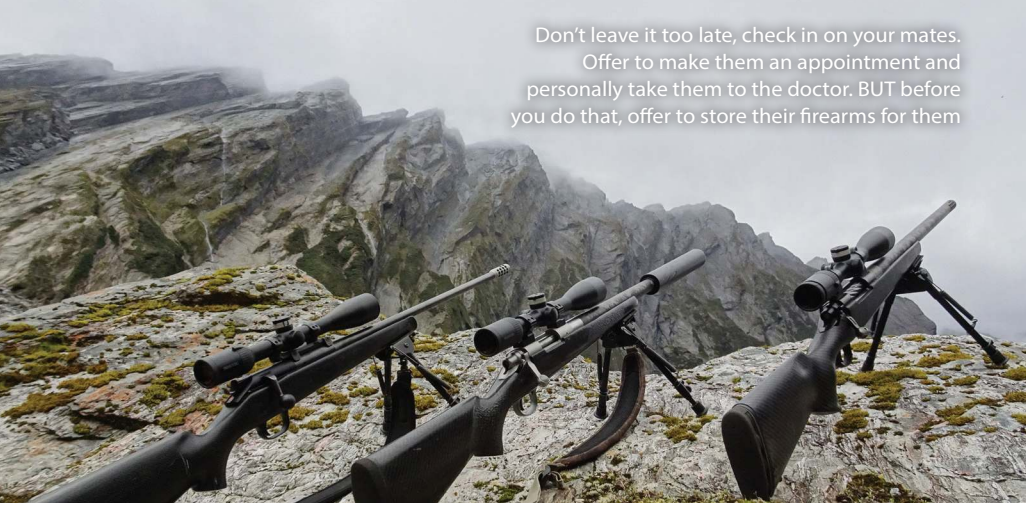
If you have created an open conversation and know your mate needs more professional help, then offer to make them an appointment and personally take them to the doctor. BUT before you do that, offer to store their firearms for them. **This way, if the GP asks the question, then you have already taken the proactive steps in being a responsible firearms licence holder and there is a high probability that the GP would not need to notify the Firearms Safety Authority.**

Glen's own years-long battle with severe depression involved suicide attempts at age 18 and then the return of the demons



Valuable and healthy socialising among friends often involves firearms

Don't leave it too late, check in on your mates.
Offer to make them an appointment and personally take them to the doctor. BUT before you do that, offer to store their firearms for them



in his late 30's. Using alcohol helped him to "turn the brain off", numb the feeling of depression and lighten the load of a stressful job. Seven years ago he really hit rock bottom and this became a real turning point in his life. He is now seven years sober, has worked with many health practitioners, and continues to thrive as a husband and father of three.

GT - "I was very lucky to have not made the biggest irreversible mistake of my life when my wife found me in the kitchen knowing I was drunk and not in a very good space. Although I was drunk, I'm pretty certain that if she hadn't come into the kitchen that night, I just may not be here now. We've been married 20 years now, and she has been so supportive of me in my depression, so the least I can do

is sort my shit out. I not only owe it to her and my daughters but I owe it to myself"

Immediately after seeking help his firearms license was revoked, taking away his "happy place" that he turned to when he needed clarity or to shift focus.

GT - "When I get in the mountains, it's like me meditating"

"I get in the moment and answer any problems or any thoughts that go through my head and just feel really good when I get home - I'm reset. If I happen to be lucky enough also to harvest an animal to feed my family the rewards are even greater"

After a lengthy appeal process, Glen managed to get his license back and get back into the mountains, and he

has now set out to create awareness and normalise the discussion of these issues within the hunting community. Glen openly manages his illness and is on a regular antidepressant which he says is a far better option than the self-medicating he was doing with the booze. Keep an eye out for his upcoming YouTube series "MentalHunts" which he and friend Sam Manson will take you hunting in epic places, whilst discussing with guests all things firearms and mental health.

GT - "I ended up making those changes and life is great! I've come out the other side"

Granted, the process is still not perfect, but it is definitely better than it was four years ago and continues to improve. The Firearms Safety Authority also knows there is still more work to do, but at least they recognise that. They are little steps at the moment but positive nonetheless.

Glen is very open to any conversations relating to firearms and mental health and opens his doors to anyone who would like to discuss his situation further or needs some guidance in this space or perhaps just wants to talk to someone neutral.

Contact Glen Via his instagram. com/mentalhunts/ or MentalHunts facebook page.



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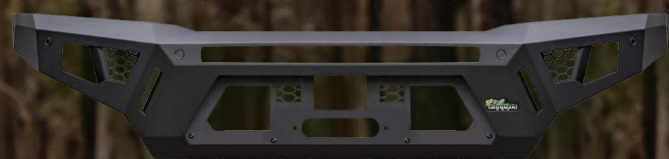
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TAHR IN 2023

AN UPDATE FROM THE TAHR FOUNDATION

WRITTEN BY ~ GERALD TELFORD



The 2023 tahr hunting season had all sorts of potential, and potential can be something to be very wary of

With little or no guiding activity since late March 2020, no AATH, and limited recreational access due to Covid there was potential for some big bulls and bulls that had not seen much hunting pressure.

With DOC cull numbers on females and juveniles passing 35,000 there was potential (that word again) to find more than one bull working any nannies – the trick was to find the nannies. Find the nanny groups and the bulls had to be present.

WHAT ARE THE NUMBERS AND WHY SHOULD THEY BE IMPORTANT?

To be brutally honest, no one really knows the numbers. No one knew how many tahr there were when the culls began and no one knows how many there are now. Counting tahr to a meaningful degree of accuracy has proven to be too expensive, yet DOC still try. We did know there were considerably more than the 10,000 allowed for in the Himalayan Tahr Control Plan 1993 (HTCP). The unanswered and impossible to know was – how many did we start with. Best estimates in 2019 had numbers within

the feral range at 35-50,000. That was an estimate drawn from aerial counts, a method with questionable accuracy at the best of times.

At best the numbers are a distraction, do numbers really mean anything to begin with? Too many tahr - we understand, not enough tahr - we understand. Habitat deprivation - we understand. It is much better to focus on environmental outcomes.

HISTORY

Step back to the 1970s, tahr numbers were heavily reduced by WARO operations. By 1976-77 helicopter operators had lost interest in tahr as it was no longer economical to hunt what few tahr remained after 10 years of aerial hunting. 1983 saw a moratorium placed on the commercial hunting (WARO) of tahr as the numbers got so low.

A number too low to be of interest to the recreational hunter. Well maybe, maybe not. I'm proof of the maybe not. I first hunted tahr in 1979, continued to hunt them through my uni years at Lincoln and finally after several fruitless East Coast trips, shot my first tahr on the West Coast in 1984 (it had milk on its lips but it was my first tahr). Tahr hunting was like looking for rocking horse poop. I vividly remember our excitement of getting a

'wall hanger' tahr on the East Coast in 1987, a beauty at 10 ¾ inches! By the time the HTCP 1993 came around our small group of three were "veteran" tahr hunters. I still have my submission to the proposed review of '93 plan from 1996!

From the late 1990s onwards tahr hunting got a lot easier. The HTCP was gathering dust on DOC bookshelves and a new generation of hunters and a handful of "veterans" were finding better numbers and trophies aplenty around the 12 inch mark. A 12 inch bull in the 90's and on into the new millennium was the benchmark and wasn't hard to find. 13-14 inch bull were the stuff of dreams.

By 2010 I had been guiding for 15 years and was taking 10-12 bulls a year on wilderness hunts throughout the East Coast on 4-5 day hunts. All the time the numbers of tahr were increasing, as were the number of hunters. By 2015 the "standard" 4-5 day wilderness hunt was now an overnight 36 hour hunt, and moved "down" valley onto private pastoral lease country. To see a 100 tahr a day and 10-40 bulls was the norm.

The wheels were about to fall off.

Off they came in 2017 when a change in Government and a new Conservation minister wasted no time in blowing the dust off the HTCP and knocking the wind out of the recreational and guiding interests all at once. Tahrmageddon had arrived. Time frame from too few to too many (1977-2017) - 40 years!



Owner - Allan Foot

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LEGISLATION

To understand DOCs determination to revisit the tahr plan it's important to understand the Himalayan Thar Control Plan (HTCP) and its unique role and the place it holds in NZ with regards to animal (management) control. The HTCP it still the only wild animal management plan in NZ that is a statutory document. Good, bad or otherwise its presence is of profound importance. It has become DOCs rulebook over the past six years, a position it has theoretically held since its drafting in 1991 though the implementation has been much less consistent.

The question has often been asked recently within hunter groups to have the HTCP reviewed and making it relevant to the present day situation. This is more feasible now that we have a change in Government, and not only a new Minister of Conservation waiting in the halls of Wellington but potentially a Minister for Hunting and Fishing.

There is now, wait for it "potential" to look at legislation and begin the slow process of law reviews.

Let's step back just a little to 2020 when Conservation Minister Kiri Allan set the wheels in motion for Conservation Law Reform. Come 2022 the Conservation Management and Processes Amendment Bill began. Stay with me here, I know everyone just wants the Tahr Foundation to make certain there are 14 inch bulls around every mountain creek corner BUT for that to become reality there are 30, 40, 50 and 70 year old pieces of legislation needing review and updating. Legislation is the first and necessary step for hunters and DOC. Once the read of the HTCP is finished there is the Wildlife Act 1953, Wild Animal Control Act 1977, 1987 Conservation Act, National Parks Act - in all 9 pieces of legislation and 14 Acts. 24 in total. A marathon of millimetres!

2023

Back to boots on the ground stuff for 2023, here are a handful of numbers to think about.

What don't we know?

It's not published how many permits are issued to rec hunters, and there's no way to know how many are tahr hunters. All we know are the rec hunter numbers for the tahr ballot blocks. How many bulls are taken by the unknown number of permitted hunters within the tahr range over any given year? No idea! How many tahr are harvested by recreational hunters throughout the tahr range? No idea! Total number of unguided overseas hunters? Unknown! Tahr killed by this group? Unknown.

What do we know?

Number of trophies exported? Best guestimate after conversations with guides, taxidermists and shippers, 1200-1500. AATH, to date 593 bulls taken on Public Conservation Land (PCL). One heli company spoken to said that 50% of their AATH bulls came from leasehold or private land, so on the strength of that the 593 could double to 1200, put in foot guides 300 and a wild guess at 1000 for recreational hunters and "others" we have 2500 trophy bulls harvested in the 2023 season.

Fitting 2500 bulls into a tahr population model it could be assumed there is a herd of 45,000+ tahr required to produce this number of trophy age bulls. NO WAY! Maybe, maybe not, its only numbers. Which with 35000+ already killed through control operations could suggest there many more tahr than anyone thought. OR, the more likely case is that with a hugely reduced nanny herd, therefore less breeding females, high attrition on young males (all young tahr), **hunters are about to run out of trophy class bulls.**

We've had the boom, here comes the



With a hugely reduced nanny population we have to be careful with our remaining bull resource. This extends to juveniles too, do your best to target the females when hunting for meat

bust (welcome back 1980).

Back to the population model, and this is science - add Ken Tustin's Mountain Monarchs to the reading list, specifically p206. More specifically from a paper Tustin and Parkes compiled for NZ Journal of Ecology 1989. The HTCP calls for a base population of 10,000 animals, for the sake of simplicity let's split it 5000 females / 5000 males. **According to Ken's work of the 5000 males, 1150 could make it to 4 years old, by 8 years old we only have 160 trophy class animals.** Keeping in mind to maintain the population at 10,000, 25% need to be removed annually.

Currently 2500 bulls are being harvest, even with 250 trophy bulls from the above equation there are over 10x too many bulls being taken if we wish to maintain our resource according to the HTCP. By the back end of the 2023 season (July/August) AATH operators, guides and taxidermists were noticing the average age and size of the bulls taken were

dropping quickly.

Before the finger is pointed at AATH, understand that they operate with a concession from DOC to undertake commercial business on conservation land. The conditions for those permits were set out to attempt to avoid conflict with other recreational users of the resource. AATH also have an industry code of practice that places further compliance on operators. There is a systems analysis of these concessions underway at present and the Tahr Foundation are heavily involved.

Finding solutions to the fast approaching scarcity of trophy bulls is the challenge. We've seen it coming for the last few years and what we presently have is not working. Is there a need to develop a bespoke management system for NZ? Yes, and the Herd Of Special Interest is the vehicle that needs to be enabled to make this happen. This will give us the elbow room within the current legislation to actively manage the tahr population for

the benefit of all users. Who will fund this? To have a fair and equitable system that can cater to the ever-growing number hunters chasing our magnificent tahr, all users will need to contribute. This may be through ballots, it may be through membership, it may be through permits for international hunters. But the long and short of it is that to have a functional tahr herd with a realistic number of mature bulls we will need to reach into our pockets to some degree. Looking internationally there are tried and tested systems built on the principles of wildlife management - good habitat equates to good animals in a healthy environment.

We need a system that works for our alpine habitat, our style of hunting, and that has a sustainable population of tahr that provides for all types of hunting - especially that which puts organic meat on our tables and demonstrates the benefits that hunting provides to the participants and the wider community.

Support the Tahr Foundation, be understanding of the difficult legal environment in which they have to operate and remember we are all volunteers focused on tahr hunting for tahr hunters and building working relationships with all stakeholders. Tahr management is the single imperative.



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Grand Winner
Douglas Hackett - my stag from this roar, shot with a 300 Win Mag in Glenorchy



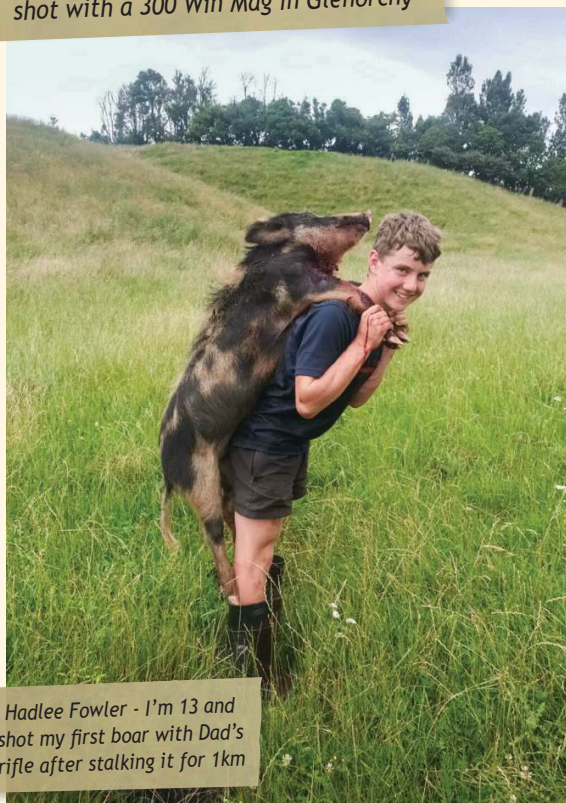
Cooper Greaney (7) on his first deer hunt in Otago



Danny Hughes with a stag we got at last light in the Orongorongos, Wellington, on his first big game hunt



Jerome Milham 10 years old with his goat head winning 1st prize at the Piopio hunting competition



Hadlee Fowler - I'm 13 and shot my first boar with Dad's rifle after stalking it for 1km



Archie Cole with his Sika hind. First time he'd used a big gun! A 6.5 Creedmoor



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WINNER



1

Will Swindley (8) managed to bag this nice Fallow buck using a Tikka T3x in 6.5 Creedmoor, from a distance of 220m near Whanganui National Park



2

Maggie Collins from Wanaka with her first deer. After many trips and much hard work it was well earned. Shot with a Tikka 223 at 50 meters

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3

Cain Pullar with a Fallow spiker shot at 150m using a Tikka T3 308 while out hunting for tahr in the Mackenzie Country

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Jason Nickson with a spiker taken using a Sako 85 308, along with his father Paul and brother Mark

4



5

Lachie Bassett (13) with three Wairarapa coastal pigs, shot with a Tikka 308



7

Levi Kerr (12) very proud of his first animal with a Tikka 243 from a West Coast hunting trip



Will Laugesen with an 8 pt coastal Wairarapa late season stag. We tracked it into manuka country and dropped it from 60 metres with Sako 270 Precision Point

6

GAME ANIMAL COUNCIL NEWS

WRITTEN BY
TIM GALE | GENERAL MANAGER



Better Hunting A game-changer for NZ hunter training

After two years of development and at least a few more years in the planning, Better Hunting, the GAC's new free-to-use online hunter education and training platform is up and running. We are pretty proud of it and see it as a bit of a game changer in hunter education and training in New Zealand.

Supported through funding from Jobs for Nature and including contributions from 24 other hunting and outdoor sector organisations, Better Hunting provides hunters with free online training on the fundamentals of hunting and hunter safety in New Zealand. **It is designed to help both new and experienced hunters learn skills that can assist them to hunt more safely and successfully.**

28 individual modules make up the programme and cover important aspects of hunting such as navigation, weather forecasting, outdoors safety, firearms safety and technique, game

animal management, harvesting mahinga kai and butchery. The modules not only provide educational content but are deliberately developed to be interactive. This means learners need to really engage their brain to perform certain tasks, which of course will help them retain the most important information.

The modules are supported by a number of skill-building games and other features, such as a hunt planner and ballot calendar.

Better Hunting is a platform specifically designed for New Zealand hunters, by New Zealand hunters, using New Zealand resources and expertise. **This means it is 100 percent relevant to the kind of hunting we do here as well as the unique place and status of game animals in New Zealand.**

There is a specific module on game animal management and as most hunters will be aware, game animal management in the New Zealand context has some differences to game animal management in many places overseas. The geography, weather and terrain we hunt in here are also pretty unique, which means how we prepare to go on a hunt and the decisions we make while out hunting are quite

different to what you'd do overseas. This, again, is reflected in Better Hunting.

With Better Hunting we also felt very strongly that we must create something that is fun and enjoyable to work through. Let's be honest, education or training courses, particularly online courses can be pretty dry at times. It's really cool that Larry, who developed Better Hunting, has been able to put some of his quirky sense of humour into it as it really gives the modules some life and personality. There are plenty of things that will make you chuckle, that's for sure.

Better Hunting is completely free to use. All you have to do is visit betterhunting.nz, sign up and get learning. While the whole course will take several hours to complete, your progress is automatically saved as you go. This means you can do one or two modules at a time and chip away at it over a few weeks.

So, whether you are a recreational hunter, aspiring commercial hunter or in to harvesting fresh wild game meat for your family and community, **Better Hunting will provide you with a good foundation of knowledge to take forward to more practical training and experiences.**

Best practice firing



There are four key aspects to good shooting. Take a look:

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Trigger

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Using a compass >

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Larry, the developer for Better Hunting

Q & A with Better Hunting developer Larry Blair

NZ Hunter: What is your background in creating e-learning platforms and what attracted you to working for the GAC on Better Hunting?

Larry: I've spent 15 years building eLearning of all kinds in NZ, Australia and the UK. I learnt of the online hunter training developer role from a HUNTS instructor during an NZDA HUNTS course. Looking it up later, it looked like a really cool way to put my professional skills to use following an interest of mine, and I'd just done practical training myself - so I went for it.

It takes a lot of time, money and effort to create something like Better Hunting and I can imagine there were probably some difficult times during the two years of development. How did you manage to achieve it largely on your own and for only a few hundred thousand dollars?

Coming from personal contracting, I had my own eLearning tools and templates that meant I could hit the ground running from day one. I was also lucky that I could refer to many written bushcraft, hunting and firearm resources, which allowed me to do a lot of first drafting before reviews by experienced hunters helped achieve the polish.

Developing Better Hunting has really been a happy marriage of my prior experience matching the needs of the job, both professionally and as a new hunter who'd just gone through the NZDA HUNTS course.

While Better Hunting is not NZ's first online hunter training platform, it is the most comprehensive and features a lot of interactive learning tools. As an e-learning expert, why is it important to engage learners in this way?

Confucius's proverb says "If I hear it, I forget. If I see it, I remember. If I do it, I know." It's important, if you want learning to stick, to get people actually doing the doing – but that's pretty hard with eLearning. I think we've done well with the interactivity, which helps learners see the useful application of the hunting and safety concepts and remember them. However, we still heavily encourage hunters to undertake practical training to really cement their learning.

Better Hunting is marketed as helping new and inexperienced hunters bridge the gap between gaining an interest in hunting, getting their firearm licence and undertaking practical training. Why is this important to position Better Hunting in this place in the market?

New Zealand needs more hunters out there hunting. Game animal populations need to be managed, and recreational hunting is a win-win way to contribute to that. But practical hunting courses do not have the capacity to meet current demands for training, and many people from urban backgrounds don't have hunters in their family to learn from, nor the rural back-block to practice on.

Better Hunting provides an instant, consistent, authoritative coverage of broad hunting skills, best practice and theory, for



anybody, anywhere in New Zealand. Practical training should always be a must-do for hunters, however not everybody can access it. Given that reality, Better Hunting provides a minimum standard and is a lot better than no training at all.

It is obvious from the content included in Better Hunting that the GAC engaged with a number of other hunting and outdoor sector organisations during development. How did this work and how critical was the involvement of others in ensuring that

Better Hunting is relevant to a wide range of users?

My experience as a novice hunter was useful as I could ask the stupid questions other new hunters would have, but there's also the risk of 'you don't know what you don't know'. It was extremely important that experienced hunters were heavily involved in conception and review of the programme. This work was partially funded through a joint Jobs for Nature grant for hunter education and training with the NZDA, and the national NZDA HUNTS team were important reviewers and sanity checkers throughout the process. We also engaged with relevant stakeholders on topic areas (e.g., Mountain Safety Council on safety, the Firearm Safety Authority on firearms, Fire and Emergency New Zealand on fires) as well as picking the brilliant hunting brains within the Game Animal Council. We then went for a wider stakeholder review, using dozens of hunting instructors, and running pilot testing with new learner hunters before going live.

With the launch now over and done with, what are your next plans for the Better Hunting platform?

There are a few more learning courses to complete such as an introduction to pig hunting and species-specific hunting. Beyond that, the underlying system Better Hunting is on is powerful, and we've barely scratched the surface.

One thing we're investigating is if we can get Better Hunting accredited to award NZCA/NZQA credits and contribute to the education pathway into the professional sector for young hunters. There's also a lot of potential for Better Hunting to go beyond set courses and support a range of active hunter work related to other areas of GAC focus, such as hunter-led game animal management operations and meat donation activities. With any luck Better Hunting will grow to be far more useful to New Zealand hunting than just training new hunters. Hopefully this is just the beginning!

The NZ Game Animal Council is a statutory organisation working to improve the management of game animals and hunting for recreation, communities, commerce and conservation.

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PRICES BASIN HUT

WRITTEN BY ~ ANDREW BUGLASS | REMOTEHUTS.CO.NZ

Price Basin Hut

Back in October of this year my partner Joke and I had the privilege of being invited along as volunteer hammer hands on a Back Country Trust funded maintenance project at Price Basin Hut in the Whitcombe Valley

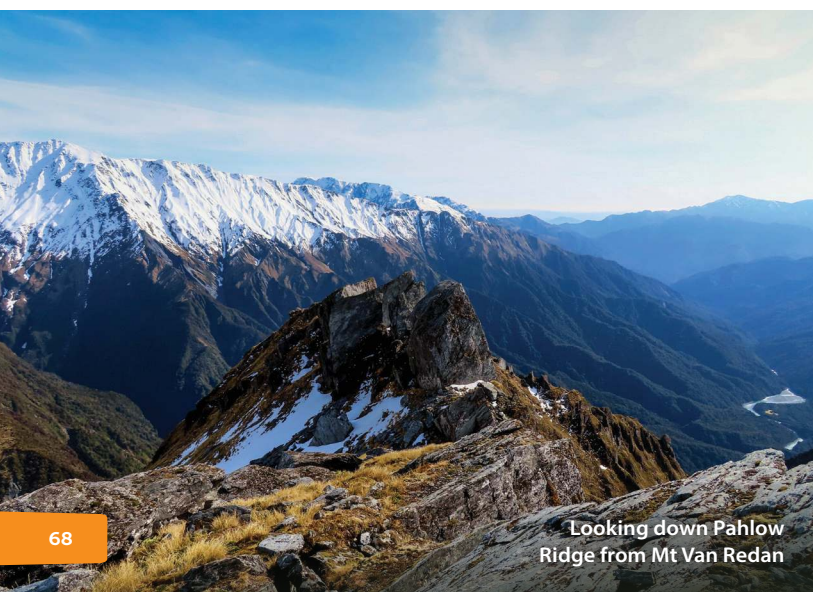
Price Basin is one of the truly remote alpine huts in central Westland. Access on foot from any direction takes a minimum of three days by a fit experienced party.

There are no tracks into the basin and all approaches involve moderately difficult alpine crossings or routes. At the end of the basin the Price River drops down a series of spectacular waterfalls and impassable gorges to the Whitcombe Valley. The surrounds are majestic and rugged and there's a true feeling of

isolation to the place. An old notebook kept at the hut chronicles in less than 20 pages all the visits from 1967 to 1996. The first few entries are exclusively those of NZFS deer cullers. After they were pulled out at the start of the 1970's visits dropped off to around 1-2 per year. There were no visits logged between March

1974 and January 1977.

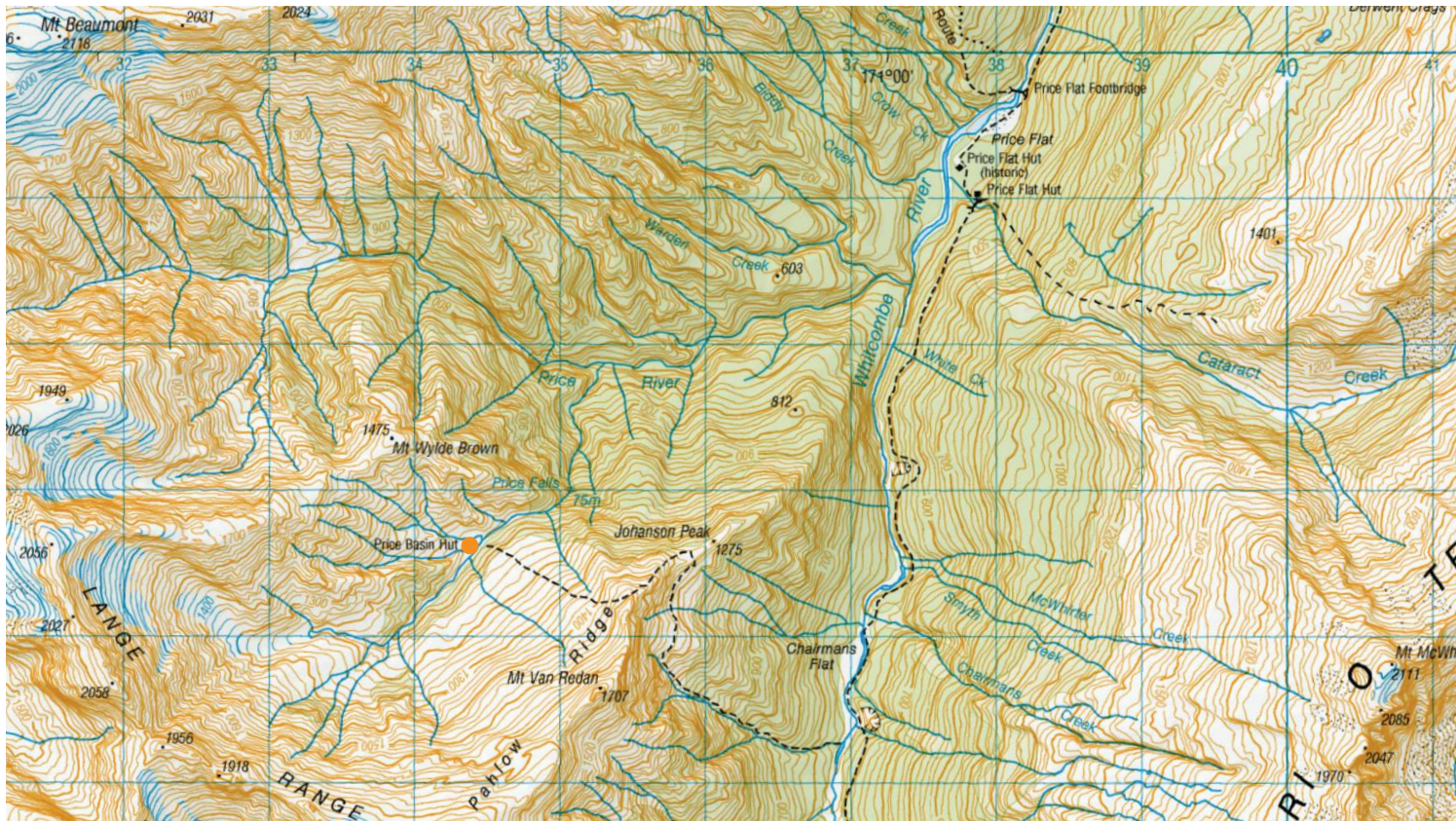
Price Basin Hut is a pretty much unmodified New Zealand Forest Service S81 four-bunk design built in 1962. It was lined with tar paper and chicken wire, as was the standard then, and has come through six decades of harsh alpine weather in remarkably sound condition despite only minimal maintenance. **A great simple design in other words, and something to be said when looking at the mind bogglingly expensive, over-engineered structures now being built in the hills.** Back in the early 2000's when the Department of Conservation was hell bent on removing low-use huts, Price Basin was spared by virtue of being located at what was then considered the northern limit of the Himalayan tahr herd.



Looking down Pahlow Ridge from Mt Van Redan



Price Basin Hut before maintenance



Its perceived value for animal control was never utilised by the Department and it remained the domain of infrequent hardy trans-alpine visitors, mainly those undertaking the crossing to or from Ivory Lake Hut in the head of the Waitaha Valley.

Going back a bit though, my first visit there was in 1987 as a 30-year-old doing a somewhat idiotic solo basin-hopping epic down the true left of the Whitcombe Valley. I survived that to return a second time in 1999 by way of a traverse of the Lange Range from Ivory Lake with a party of friends. On that trip we got stuck in a horrendous downpour in the lower Whitcombe and had to break into an illegal hut to shelter as the river visibly rose around us and blocked

our passage. I was really chuffed then to be able to return, by air this time, to this magic spot, and read those old entries in the hut book.

Although ostensibly DOC maintained, the only input Price Basin received after the disestablishment of the NZFS in 1986 was some painting and resealing work done in 2004. After this the Permolat group had it in its sights for a while, then Ted Brennan and Annie Hughes of Bold Head took a lead role. They assembled the materials for the re-roofing and then were happy to hand it over to BCT who are better resourced for this kind of stuff. We accompanied the BCT carpenters Clint Jarvis and Mark Williamson and while they worked on the roof, we painted the hut exterior.

The weather was beautiful and warm, allowing us to get all the coats on and still have time for a walk up onto Mt Van Redan before the machine came to get us. The peaks of the Lange Range are pretty gnarly and the drop off into the Whitcombe is awesome and vertical in many places. The approaches from the basin however, are

relatively gentle and easy travel and there are spectacular views of Whitcombe Pass, the Bracken Snowfield, and Erewhon Col from Pahlow Ridge.

Increased online profiling has attracted more fly-in hunting parties to Price Basin, around five a year currently. **The increased popularity of Ivory Lake as a destination has seen a significant increase in trans-alpine groups passing through, around 2-3 a year.** As far as hunting goes there aren't huge numbers of animals in the basin. Chamois are scattered throughout as is the odd wandering tahr (which have never really established here in large numbers). Deer do venture onto the tops but are more likely to be found down in the sub-alpine forest if you are silly enough to want to head down into it.

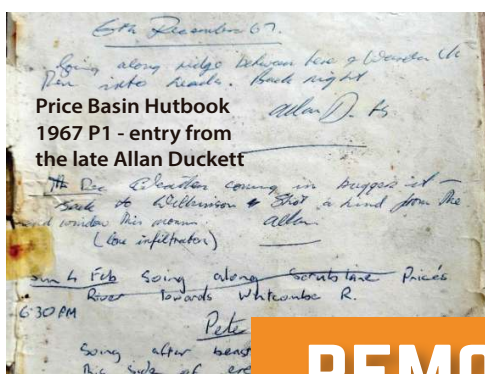
We are extremely privileged to have shelters like Price Basin Hut as part of our back-country network. There's nothing to compare with it anywhere else in the world. Low-use structures like Price are increasingly being maintained by volunteer and user groups which is

logical and probably the only way to vouchsafe their long-term retention and upkeep. Although access is challenging and the routes rough and rudimentary there's magic here to enjoy if you can make it that far.

More information on the Price Basin Hut can be found at <http://remotehuts.co.nz/huts/price-basin-hut.html>



Pahlow Ridge



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CAPACITY



1588KG TOWING
CAPACITY



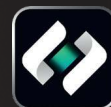
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THUNDER
ZOOM 2.0

MODEL

RANGE

FOV

MAG

SENSOR

NZD inc Gst

RRP Display

TQ60Z 2.0

1800m
3000m

12.5° × 10°
7.3° × 5.9°

1.8x-14.6x
3.1x - 25.0x (8x)

640 × 512, 12 µm
NETD < 20mK

\$7,699.00

TH50Z 2.0

1200m
2600m

10.5° × 7.9°
5.3° × 4°

2.2x-17.4x
4.3x - 34.6x (8x)

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20mK

Ultra clear image, impressive detail
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Condor

MODEL

RANGE

FOV

MAG

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NZD inc Gst

RRP Display

CQ50L

2600m

8.80° × 7.03°

3.0x-24.0x (8x)

640 × 512, 12 µm

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CQ35L

1800m

12.5° × 10.0°

2.0x-16.0x (8x)

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CH35L

1800m

7.5° × 5.6°

3.5x-28.0x (8x)

384 × 288, 12 µm

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CH25L

1200m

10.53° × 7.9°

2.5x-20.0x (8x)

NETD < 20mK

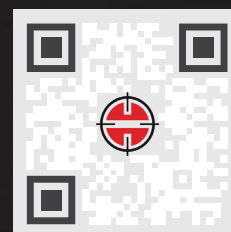
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POERUA RIVER

WRITTEN BY
CAM MCKAY | POINTS SOUTH

TAHR BALLOT BLOCKS

Looking down
the unnamed
south branch of
the Poerua

Dominated by Mount Adams and the particularly jagged Adams Range, the Poerua flows from the now marginally glacial Poerua Glacier in its head basin

The head basin is stunning and further down the valley the travel is problematic, with a nasty lower gorge that few people bother to try and traverse on foot.

This valley has seen a fair bit DOC culling as well as the ZIP operation to the south no doubt taking a few more animals. When I was last in there, a couple seasons after Eugene Sage's siege began en-masse, we certainly noticed much lower animal numbers and less distinct tahr trails to follow than we had seen in previous years. That said it's still a stunning place

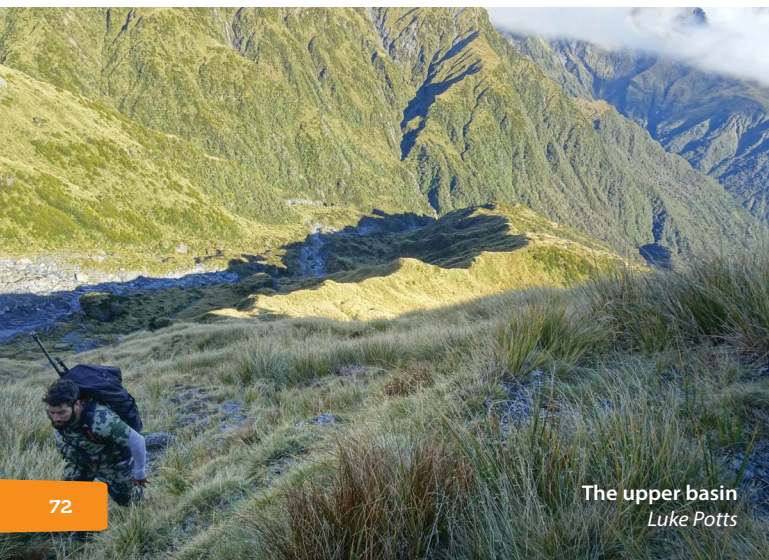
to hunt, with certainly enough animals to keep you interested.

There's two landing sites, with the lower giving good access to the two unnamed creeks heading North and South. With the lower landing site situated at about 700m above sea level, you'll be well sheltered and well

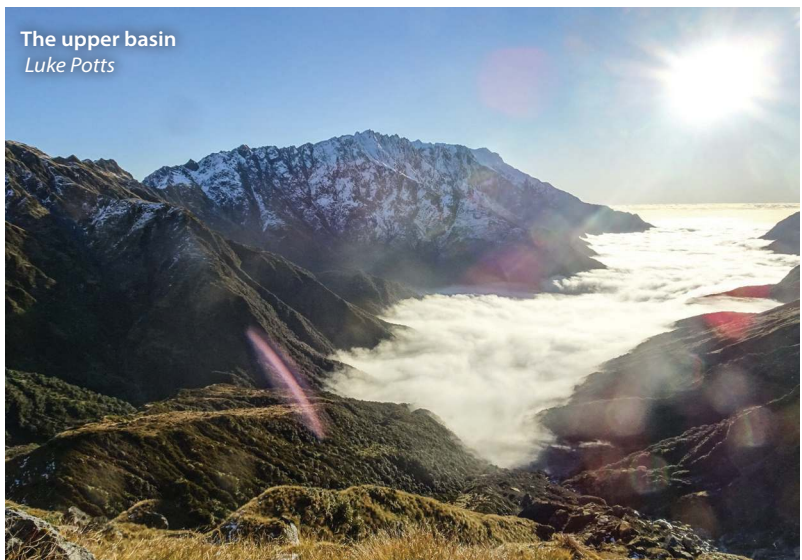
positioned to climb to creeks daily to watch over the endless scrubby faces and upper open country.

The upper landing site is at about 1150m above sea level, and is still relatively sheltered, but it is a touch limited for tussock-free flat spots. **If you're sitting out a good amount of rain here a small shovel would be a must to help redirect the water that will flow around camp.** Keep that campsite tidy but this time it's not the kea but the camp weka that will make off with whatever they can carry -but they do provide quite a fitting soundtrack once the sun has gone down.

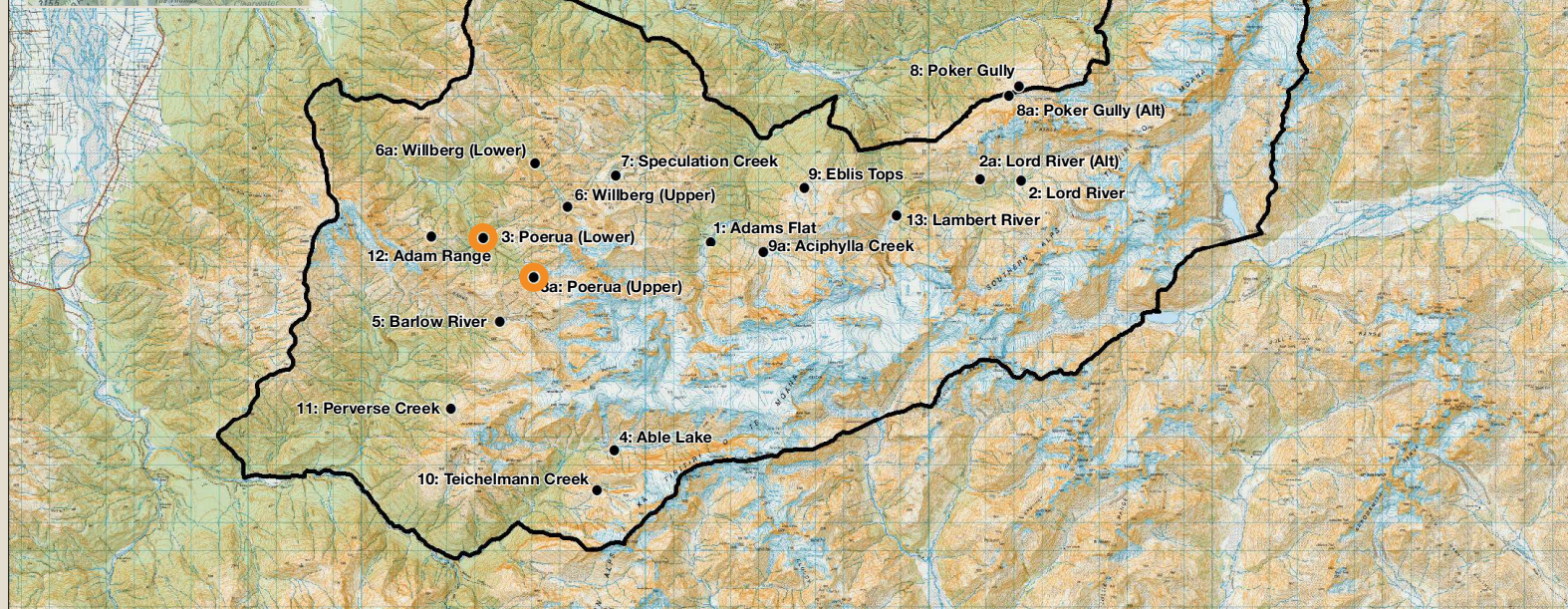
The ridge behind camp gives good access to the centre of the head basin, giving you



The upper basin
Luke Potts



The upper basin
Luke Potts



a great look into the steep country on either side. With plenty of unrecoverable country on both sides of the head basin, it becomes the usual tactic of getting closer and being there at the right time when that mature bull crosses through some terrain you can actually access.

If you are lucky enough to get some stable weather, let alone lucky enough to draw this landing site, bear in mind that in stable weather you'll be dealing with that classic Westland clag that rolls in daily. **It's often frustrating waiting it out, but occasionally really helpful in helping you close the gap.**



The steep country in the head basin



Upper Camp
Luke Potts

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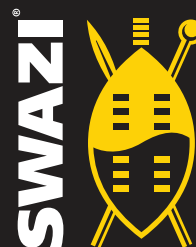


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Display	1024 x 768 AMOLED
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Optical Magnification	3x ~ 12x
Objective Lens	35mm
Pixel Pitch	12µm
Eye Relief	70mm
Frame Rate	50Hz
Field of View	7.5°x5.6°
NETD	≤40mk
Weight	<950g
Dimensions	385 x 85 x 75mm
Max Battery life	15 hours
Built-in memory	32GB



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Detector Resolution	640 x 512	Frame Rate	50Hz
Display	1024 x 768 OLED	Field of View	12.6°x10.1°
Detection Range	1818m	NETD	≤35mK
Laser Rangefinder	800m	Weight	400g
Objective Lens	35mm	Dimensions	160 x 90 x 50mm
Pixel Pitch	12µm	Max Battery life	6 hours
Optical Magnification	2x ~ 8x	Built-in memory	32GB



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NZDA
New Zealand Deerstalkers Association

GWYN THURLOW - NZDA

Photo: Andrew Martin



Wapiti

Cervus elaphus nelsoni

Male = Bull

Female = Cow

Young = Calf

Widely regarded as the pinnacle of New Zealand hunting, the mighty wapiti (known as elk in North America) are found only in certain areas of Fiordland, where potential expansion is limited due to natural barriers. Every year hunters enter a ballot managed by the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation, in the dream of getting the chance to secure a bull.

Initial Liberations:

Wapiti were first introduced to New Zealand in the 1870s on Kawau Island, north of Auckland, and 1880s, near Dunedin. Unfortunately, these attempts resulted in the animals dying soon after release. Years later, in 1905, a total of 20 Wapiti were shipped to New Zealand from the USA. Ten were a gift from the then President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, and ten more were purchased by T.E. Donne from a game farm in Massachusetts. The first leg of their journey to New Zealand was by train from Massachusetts to Washington, D.C, and from there to San Francisco (crossing the entirety of the US from East to West). From San Francisco, they were loaded onto a ship and commenced the 10,000km journey across the Pacific Ocean to Wellington. A severe storm just off the coast caused two of the animals to die from broken backs, resulting in only 18 Wapiti making it to our

shores alive. Upon reaching Wellington, the animals were transferred onto another vessel, the ss Hinemoa, and were eventually released into the South-West Arm of George Sound, Fiordland, on March 3rd, 1905.

Wapiti vs Elk

The naming of Wapiti is quite interesting. For a start, most people in their native range of the USA refer to them as "elk" – a technically incorrect term that is supposed to refer to the Eurasian moose, *Alces alces*. The source of this incorrect terminology can be traced back to European settlers, who would have never seen a Wapiti before so simply named it the same as their largest deer species back home. The term "Wapiti" comes from the indigenous Shawnee Indian language, and is really the correct name for these animals, both in New Zealand and North America. In Asia, they are referred to as Malu, or "Horse-deer".

What Wapiti?

There are 10 subspecies of Wapiti: four in North America, the rest in Asia. Many people think that the subspecies in New Zealand is Roosevelt "elk" (*Cervus elephus roosevelti*), but this is incorrect. The subspecies in New Zealand are the Rocky Mountain subspecies, *Cervus elaphus nelsoni*. From the 1700s through to the 1950s Wapiti were classed as their own species, *Cervus canadensis*. This has since been changed to *Cervus elaphus*, making them technically the same species as Red deer. Debate still rages over whether this is actually the case or not, and the change to *elaphus* has still not been

updated on Wikipedia, fuelling the fire of this debate.

What is a trophy?

To be entered in the NZDA Record Books, a Wapiti bull needs a Douglas Score of at least 380 DS. The current New Zealand record is 474 6/8 DS, taken by Edger Nitz at Glaisnock Valley, Fiordland in 1933. This trophy is on display at the NZDA National Office and Museum in Wellington.

Further Reading

Banwell, D. Bruce (2001). *The Wapiti and The Moose*. The Halcyon Press.

Smith, Michael (1974). *Biology And Management of The Wapiti Of Fiordland, New Zealand*. NZDA.





BULL



YOUNG BULL

DRAWN BY ~ FRANCESCO FORMISANO

GAME ANIMALS OF NEW ZEALAND WAPITI

COW



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Photo by Mitchell Ewart

Carol had carefully closed the gap from 150 to 25 yards of this mature sika stag while he was bedded. Patiently waiting an hour and a half, the stag eventually stood up to check a distant roar and in an instant was standing just seven yards from Carol. After a three-minute stare down the stag moved off and out of sight. Unfortunately the stag never gave Carol an opportunity to draw her bow before it moved away. While a shot hadn't been fired it had truly been a memorable experience.

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GARMIN

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

ALPHA 300i AND T20/TT25 COLLARS

Garmin never rest on their laurels, and it was with great excitement I learnt of the most recent development in their market-leading dog tracking equipment – the 300i handheld, and TT25 and T20 collars

THE HANDHELD - ALPHA 300i

The 200 was a vast improvement on the Alpha 100, but the 300 is more like an update. It has the same body, but vast improvements in technology. As with the 200, the 'i' designation stands for InReach. Meaning you can purchase a cheaper unit without the InReach satellite messaging functionality. I can't recommend it highly enough though. Almost all of our hunting is out of cellphone reception and we use InReach all the time, be it for messaging each other or home.

The 300 series has moved to a USB-C charger, as opposed to the Micro-USB in the 200. This is a more widely available charger and is quicker. Unfortunately they still have the charger sticking out the back, not hanging down like most.

While keeping the same body, they've kept the same battery, but by some voodoo magic they've hugely increased the battery life to 55 hours. I have been regularly getting two days of active hunting out of it, previously I was lucky to get one. This is a huge improvement and nearly worth the upgrade regardless of the software gains.

By using the same battery it means you can still use the spare batteries you might have purchased for the 200.

The 3.5" touchscreen has improved too, with better sensitivity, better colour rendition out of light and an even brighter backlight. It is glove compatible, which is fantastic for leather gloves in the blackberry.

Software-wise the 300 has had some big changes. It's more customizable now, with an extra line of buttons down the bottom of the screen. This 'favourites bar' stays across all screens - for me I have map, dog list and the InReach there.

The main menu can be displayed as large or small grids, or in list form.

The dog list can now share collars to other units en-masse. You assign all of the collars you want shared to a group, then share the whole group – up to 20 collars. This makes the pre-hunt faff a lot easier. I get a lot of deerstalkers laughing at the minutes that drag on while we sort the collars out between various units in the morning!

Channel View is a new feature for the 300. This scans the 100 Alpha channels to

see which are being used. This will help you change any collars that are sharing a channel with other collars in the area and avoid interference. **You can't track those other collars, and they can't track you, and you avoid using the same channel.**

While this level of customization might sound a bit daunting, once I had the shortcuts set up how I wanted them I never had to touch it again.

Aftermarket maps are a must, and there are a few options here. The best are the factory Garmin maps and the Topo4GPS by Ampro, which I used in this unit. There was an occasional glitch with the Topo4GPS, but Garmin are working on a fix and are at pains to say that wasn't planned to punish aftermarket mapmakers. BirdsEye is available for these units too. If you're hunting the same block regularly I'd highly recommend downloading this. It gives you reference points that aren't always displayed on a topo map like large trees, slips or even fence corners.

There was no discernible advantage for range of communication with collars, we used two 300i's extensively alongside two 200i's, an Alpha 100 and even an old Astro 430. Even in a test with four collars (TT15, T10, TT25 and T20) driven away on a quad bike and all six units side-by-side, there was no regularity as to who lost comms first, nor did any have a clear advantage.



Fern appreciating the smaller, lighter new TT25



The progression of units available over the last seven years



New TT25 on the left, compared with the previous model, the TT15x on the right



The new design of charger clips, with USB-C charging, on the right

COLLARS - T20 & TT25

The partner upgrade to the 300 series has been the T20 and TT25 collars. Smaller, lighter and with better battery life these are a huge step up.

The T20 is 45 grams lighter than its predecessor the T10 at 240 grams, and the TT25 shaves 50 grams off the TT15 at 262 grams. Dimensionally they're about the same width and length, but shave a good 7mm off the depth, making for a lower profile collar less prone to snag – similar to the mini collars but without the battery compromise. The extra weight might not sound like much, but per kilo of body weight that's going to add up on a small dog.

This battery is an immense advantage. With the dynamic update rate enabled (why wouldn't you!) you can achieve up to 136 hours of use. The dynamic update rate senses the dogs various movements and adjusts the update rate. When they're moving a lot, tracking, it keeps the update rate high so you can see every movement. If they're stationary then it slows it right down, conserving battery. I checked this out on the TT25 around home, getting 84 hours of use. If the dog was moving less then I

can see how you could get to 136 hours.

Not only does this give you more flexibility on the hill (for those days when you forget to charge the collars) but it means you can do multi-day trips and not need to carry in a car battery sized powerbank for keeping the dogs going. **You'll also be much more sure of finding a lost dog the next day.**

The next evolution of this is the 'Rescue Mode'. If you're running low on juice, or expect the dog to be gone for a very long time, you can enable rescue mode. Enabling this adjusts the collar settings so that when the collar reaches 25% battery life the update rate for the collar automatically changes to 2 minutes, regardless of its activity. Unfortunately to turn on this mode the dog collar must be within 3 metres of the handheld. You cannot enable rescue mode at a distance, so its main advantage is if you're running a half-flat collar and don't want to risk it dying.



We've had a busy winter with the new gear! Busy if somewhat frustrating. We've done well numbers-wise, but struggled to find many bigger boars

The new collars have moved to USB-C chargers, enabling a smaller charging connector and more available cords. The plug is USB at both ends, meaning you can charge from a powerbank or a wall outlet. The TT25 comes with long prongs for use with hairy dogs or rip collars.

The good news is you don't need to buy the 300i and the new collars in one hit if that's stretching the budget. The 300 tracks all collar models back to the T5, and the collars are compatible all the way back to the Astro 430.

The 300i and new collars are significant upgrades. The battery life is a huge improvement, but all of the other tweaks are appreciated refinements on an already superb system.



FENIX HT18 SPOTLIGHT

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

The HT18 lighting up 400m with ease. Jake getting distracted while he's meant to be finding the track for me

We first introduced Fenix in Issue 96 with the HM65R headlamp. The HT18 is another great product, but aimed at the night hunting market

It is a small, portable spotlight producing 1500 lumens in a tightly focused beam that is rated to 1000 yards. It is compact and easily mounted to a rifle.

At 7.2" (182mm) long and only 7.8oz (220g) it's very easy to carry, and the belt pouch makes it very simple. The 67mm lens requires a long clamp to mount it to a rifle, but it's worth it for the performance.

It uses a rear button for on/off and a momentary half-press for a quick flash. There is a side button to adjust brightness level, this isn't recessed though so I did find myself bumping it occasionally. Fortunately you don't need to cycle through the settings every time you turn it on, it has a memory. A long press gives you the option of two different strobe settings. In the centre of this button is the battery indicator LED - Green for 75-100%, flashing green for 50-75, red for 25-50 and flashing red for below 25.

It uses a 5,000 mAh rechargeable 21700 li-ion battery, with direct USB-C charging – a fantastic addition. You can also use an adaptor to run size 18650 batteries like the HM65R uses, but this reduced both range and battery life – good to have for a spare though. It charges over approximately

four hours via a USB-C cord, and using the highest of the four modes (low, medium, high and turbo) it lasts about 1 hour 40 minutes. **I found this ample for a night of spotlighting as you either used a headlamp or low mode for walking about.** Low mode is rated out to 61 hours, using only 30 lumens. This is something I like about Fenix, the lowest power setting is extremely economical on battery life.

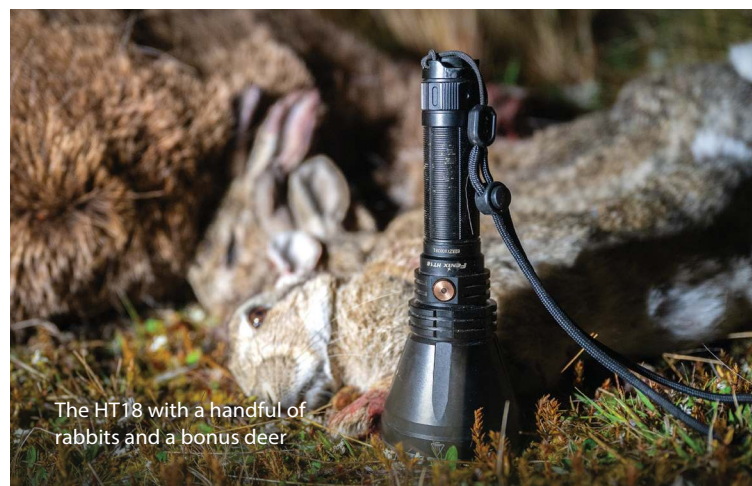
Rated to extreme temperatures, it will operate in climates from -35 to +45. It also uses the rugged magnesium alloy found across the Fenix range, combined with the IP68 weatherproofing rating making durability a given. It can withstand submergence for 2 ½ minutes.

In the box are red and green filters, great for your night sight and there is some evidence that

the green is less visible to animals and therefore spooking them. Also included are a belt pouch, lanyard, charging cable and spare O-ring – a surprisingly thoughtful inclusion. It also comes with a limited lifetime warranty.

I had a heap of fun using the HT18. Walking up on crop raiding deer, shooting rabbits and possums with the kids mounted on a 22, hand held while culling 90 peacocks roosting in big gum trees and simply route finding in the ute while we navigated our way down a big Canterbury riverbed at night - it handled it all. I was extremely impressed by its range, battery life and portability in such a compact unit.

A big thanks to Mountain Adventure for giving us a substantial time to review this torch, I have had it for eight months now and it hasn't skipped a beat. In that time Fenix have updated the model to include the HT18R, with more range, exterior charging and several improved features.



The HT18 with a handful of rabbits and a bonus deer

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POINTS SOUTH TIPI TENT & TITANIUM STOVE

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

The biggest test for the tent, a week up the Godley in winter

Hot tents have seen massive uptake in NZ, and rightly so. They're an absolute game changer for any type of hunting, but especially South Island winter hunting

Having a large, warm, home base at the end of the day is worth a million dollars when you're wet, cold and exhausted. Being able to dry gear and sleep better makes you more effective on the hill, and the social aspect is second-to-none. No more crawling into a sleeping bag and shivering to sleep at 7pm because it's too cold to sit and talk to your mates!

We've had a range of canvas offerings in recent years, but the lighter tipi style have only just made an entrance. This 6-person from Points South is a superb example. It's sold me on the style.

After three years of prototyping, with input from hunters and tent experts, hundreds of nights in the field and many changes Cam McKay from Points South has created a **6-person tent with a stove that weighs only 12kg!** And with some optimizing you can get that weight down even more, the heavy duty stainless pegs are 2.5kg of that weight and you only need them in exposed sites. Wall tents I have used push over 20kg regularly, and take up far more bulk.

In situations where you use helicopters, jetboats or even quad bikes the lesser weight and bulk of this tent will make

life a lot easier. It's so small that it's viable on packraft trips or even walking it a reasonable distance with a group.

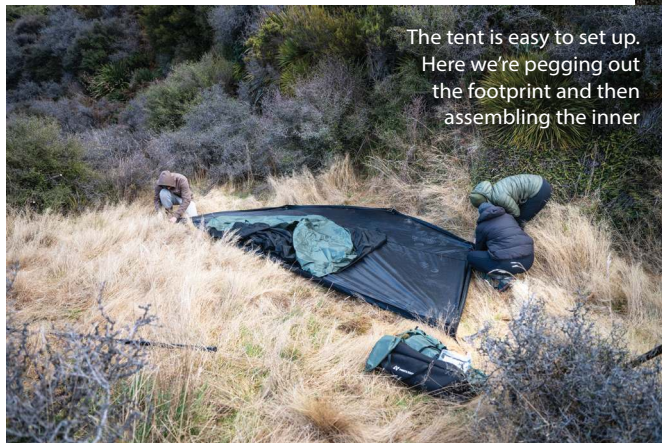
We threw it in the deep end with a mid-winter drive in trip up the Godley and gave it a good test with snow and howling Norwesters.

TENT

With only a central pole and eight guy ropes the setup is very quick, especially with four people on the job. It is quite forgiving in tight or uneven sites, the self-balancing double guy ropes allow you to pitch from humps in the ground. A great feature was making these reflective – nothing worse than tripping

The super light titanium stove. 1950 grams





The tent is easy to set up. Here we're pegging out the footprint and then assembling the inner



Inner half-tub and bug screen. These photos give you an idea of the space needed, and the great headroom inside

over the guy ropes and getting a face full of snow in the middle of the night!

The inner is a half-tub and bug screen, the tub is made of 210D Oxford nylon. I like this system. The bug screen is a life saver and it makes sense to have a wet and dry area. You can step into the tent, drop firewood, remove wet clothes and boots, and keep the sleeping side in the half-tub clean and dry. If you wanted to you can use the inner on one side and the tub/footprint on the other, creating a dry floor for the whole tent but I preferred to keep one side reliably dry and hole-proof, and one side as an area we could walk into with boots on.

Despite being 5m wide, and rated as a 6 person tent, I found this is probably only true without the fire erected – unless they were very small people with asbestos sleeping bags. That fire can get insanely hot (which is very welcome on winter nights down to negative 15!) and your sleeping bag would only have to brush it to be ruined. **We had three people in the half tub and one person in the open side, along with all of our gear, and had heaps of room.**

The tapered shape provides for good gear storage around the edges, and if you pair that with stretchers then there's room for everything including the kitchen sink! The only downside was having to reach down to the very corner of the tipi tent to unzip the door. With a 5m diameter it's quite a stretch down that taper to reach the end of the zip, and wet as the single wall gets condensation by the door, but adding a small rod with a split ring fixes that issue. With all of this space you need a substantial site to place your tent, a 5m circle can be tricky to find in some places. That being said, there's nothing to stop you pitching the tent right over top of a handy boulder to use it as seating inside!

This same tapered shape helped in the wind. The centre is quite high, so it catches a bit, but at least all of the walls slope down so while it does flap and shake in a howling gale the tent will hold on as long as your pegs are secure, there are no flat sides to catch wind like a sail.

After a big trip in rain and snow, and a 16 hour drive home, it was great peace of mind having a nylon fly as it is less prone to destructive mould like canvas is. There felt like a little less insulation in the lighter nylon compared to a canvas wall tent, but that's a fair counterbalance to the weight savings. It is built using high tenacity 6.6 40D Silnylon with a hydrostatic head rating of 5000mm, and seam sealing on both the fly and the tub.



A warm, spacious camp at the end of the day makes winter hunting a more appealing prospect



Jake warming up on a rainy day



Sam and Shayla dishing up lunch on the same rain day



The stove can put out an incredible amount of heat



Here's the tent being used for extra accommodation at Ngamatea

STOVE

Erecting the chimney took some head scratching to begin with, I'd recommend watching a youtube video before you hit the hills. It's effectively a three metre roll of titanium tinfoil, and you roll it lengthwise and bind it with stainless steel rings to create the flue. It's quite delicate, so assemble it carefully on a flat surface and light the fire before you go bush, this will 'set' a bit of shape to the foil, making it easier to set

up in future.

The firebox is six simple panels which clip together and are held together by long threaded rods and nuts, the bottom of which become the legs. The weight of the fire is astounding, and the fiddliness of the flue and the box are completely fair and warranted penalties for the incredible weight – only 1950 grams! At 3m the flue is quite long, making it difficult to get the fire to draw when first lit, but you can shorten it as much as you dare. Just be mindful of hot sparks falling on the nylon.

One thing we learnt to watch out for was tar in the chimney, we camped in the same spot for a couple days straight and burnt some nasty, sap-rich pine which caused a lot of tar in the chimney. This ended up squeezing out of the fold of the chimney and smoking badly. Try to use a cleaner burning firewood, or do what we did and pull the chimney down and clean it. The rolling process (best shown in videos, a bit hard to explain) where you twist the foil up to make a roll for packing it away is also great at scraping the dried tar out.

I like how Cam has offset the fireplace, in a lot of tent designs the flue is right in the middle. As I've mentioned earlier, that stove gets nuclear in temperature, so it's better to be slightly more out of the thoroughfare from the half tub to the door and it keeps it away from the fine bug screen – that would melt quick if it touched the flue.

In all I rated this tent highly. It is a great solution which provides warmth and shelter in a communal space for half of the weight of options we've used previously. **The nylon is low maintenance and the design is inherently simple and strong. Well done Cam.**



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SWAROVSKI

7X21 CL CURIO 10X25 CL POCKET BINOCULARS

WRITTEN BY ~ GREG DULEY

Swarovski's CL pockets have set the gold standard for mini binoculars for many years now

There is nothing that any other manufacturer has produced before or since to knock them off their perch

Originally produced in 8x25 and 10x25, the Pockets are of the double hinge design where the barrels fold up next to each other, to provide the most compact unit when not in use. They are centre focus, with the focusing knob in the usual place. The dioptic correction is underneath the front of the hinge bridge. They have Swarovski's twist out eyecups, and are finished with the usual mix of anodised alloy and rubber armouring. Close focussing to 2.5 metres is an advantage in some of the situations these mini binos will get used for. They come in the classy Swarovski cordura pouch including a simple webbing neck strap. They are waterproof to a depth of 4 metres and have the usual 10 year warranty.

OPTICALLY SPEAKING

These are of the compact roof prism type with the best Barium Crown Bak-4 glass. They include Swarobright, Swarotop and Swarodur prism and lens multi coatings for optimum phase correction (which all roof prism's need), light transmission and coating longevity. They do not have fluorite glass, which although providing the absolute pinnacle of colour rendition and contrast, is heavier and might detract from the purpose of these compact binoculars

Swarovski have now released and even smaller version in their pocket line they call the 7x21 CL Curio.

These are a significant step down again in size and weight over the 8x and 10x25mm compacts. Optically,

mechanically and ergonomically they are the same.

I never fail to be amazed how well Swarovski compacts stack up on the optical tests. Resolution wise in good light they are always only just behind their full size big brothers with the same optical system. Yes, there is a noticeable difference if you compare them to the absolute state of the art Swarovski NL Pure optical system but there is not another binocular in the world that can compare with their exquisite viewing experience. In the twilight test, obviously the compacts lose more resolution than their big brothers due to the smaller exit pupil, but that is the compromise for their tiny size and weight. Their FoF score was very good with objects remaining in focus across 95% of the FoV, and overall the viewing experience was very pleasant. Glare was well controlled, barrel and lens alignment was excellent, and distortion was minimal – especially in the 7x21s.

So the biggest compromise with these compacts is their twilight performance, but practically what does an 8 score mean? On a clear day with a shorter twilight period it will only mean a couple

The CL Curio 7x21 and CL Pocket 10x25 lined up next to a pair of EL Range 10x42's for comparison



CL Curio 7x21



of minutes less viewing at the end of the day. On a dull overcast day it might mean more like 15 minutes though. You'll have to decide if that is too much of a compromise for the weight and portability. They are a little more finicky to use, and a little harder to hold still due to their lightweight compared with their big brothers. You do get very good optics for a very reasonable price with these Pocket CLs, a way better idea than buying cheaper full size binoculars for the same money in my opinion. **But the biggest advantage, especially with the new 7x21 Curios, is that you will always have them with you. They are so small and light you will never have to wonder if you can be bothered carrying them!**



SIZE	RESOLUTION	FLATNESS OF FIELD	TWILIGHT PERFORMANCE	GLARE	FOV	WEIGHT	DIMENSIONS LxWxH	RRP
10x25	9.25	9.5	8	9.75	98	350gm/12.3oz	110x98x46	\$1390
8x25	9	9.5	8	9.75	119	345gm/12.2oz	110x98x46	\$1290
7x21	9	9.5	8	9.75	135	250gm/8.9oz	92x95x44	\$1190

TATONKA MODULUS PACK SYSTEM

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

Tatonka have a reputation for reliability and load carrying ability, and their foray into the load shelf style of packs continues that heritage

The Modulus is a frame and bag system with three different 'sac' options, ranging from 30l, 55l through to 75l all mounted on a frame based on the legendary X1 Bison harness.

The Modulus X1 frame is exactly the same as the Bison, except it has been shaved down by about 20mm aside to better cater to the smaller pack sizes offered and it has even more padding on the straps. However, the key feature is the load shelf between the frame and the bags, and this can be used without a

bag attached, making it one of the more flexible systems around. You can stow a rifle in here too, either butt down against the shelf (that wants to be a short rifle) or muzzle down, through a hole in the load shelf for this purpose. Though this only works with the 30l sac, the 55 and 75 sacs attach over the top of the frame.

Living up to its modular name and nature, you can even add extra straps to the frame if you find you need them. Either side of the frame has a fiberglass rod, which you can withdraw and then thread on additional straps where you want them, or simply rearrange things from the factory.

The frame has a fabric shelf with two adjustable straps to tailor it for height, with two big heavy-duty straps that then cross the load laterally. With a big heavy load you can stretch the straps from the load shelf right around the pack to pull all of the weight (and/or antlers!) back to the frame nice and tight.

There are nine total attachment points to separate the big sacs from the frame,



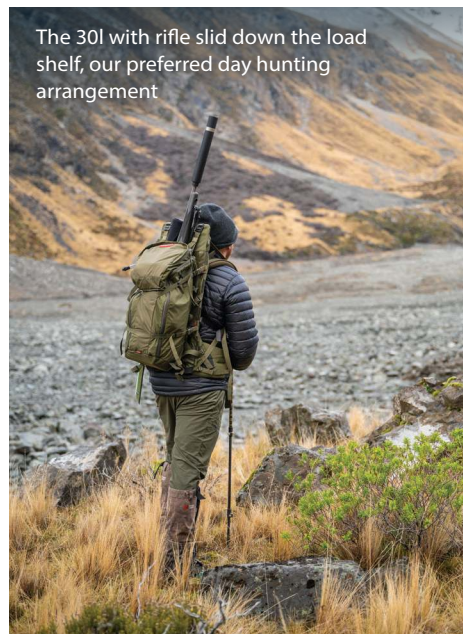
Three easy stages to fill the load shelf. Lay it all out



Then strap the item to the load shelf



Then re-attach the pack over the load



The 30l with rifle slid down the load shelf, our preferred day hunting arrangement

however five of those are simple G hooks. There is one less with the 30l bag, but they use different loops at the top. The quick design with the G hooks was very appealing for me. When you're cold and tired on the hill you don't want to be faffing around with frozen fingers on a dozen different buckles. **For this reason I tend to keep the frame straps all done up and hidden behind the sac until I need them, otherwise it can get a little bewildering as to which strap goes where.**

If you're using the Modulus to regularly carry stuff on the load shelf then the 30l pack is the easiest to fit around your load. Partly because of its size, but also because it has adjustment on the top and bottom straps. It also has a full length zip right around the sac, meaning you can open it right up and easily access things stowed at the bottom. It makes a great daypack in this arrangement as we used for Sam's tahr hunt, just doing day trips from a base but planning to come home heavy one day - exactly as



The 30l showing its attachment to the frame, and the large perimeter zip and the easy access it provides

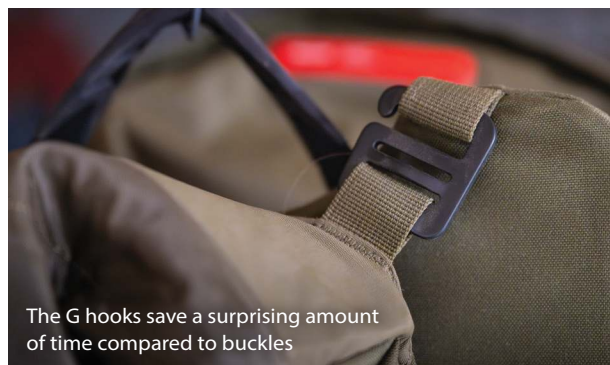
it panned out! The 75l sac is just like the other Tatanka multi-day options, with two compartments and a range of exterior pockets.

Unfortunately all these features do come at a cost. The frame is 2.8kg alone, and the sacs range from 1 to 1.4kg. A 4.2kg 75l pack is fairly up there, the Yukon 70+10 is only 2.6kg.

These packs have a fairly specific application, but for someone like a guide who is regularly going in relatively light but coming out with a lot of meat, then they're definitely worth checking out. **For regular meat hunting it is nice to keep the meat out of your pack and snugged nice and tight hard up against the frame.**



Cody Weller switching from the 75l sac he walked in with, to the 30l sac for a hunt



The G hooks save a surprising amount of time compared to buckles



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PARD TD32-70 HYBRID SCOPE

WRITTEN BY ~IAN GUNN

The TD32-70 mounted on my Bergara BMR in 17HMR

My introduction to the world of night vision began quite inadvertently

I had recently replanted a block of grapevines and one morning I was greeted with a scene of carnage. Shredded plastic spray guards, splintered bamboo stakes and vines chewed right down to bare stumps. The height the bamboo had been chewed led me to think it was probably hares

Looking around that evening I saw a couple of likely suspects and managed to get one with my PCP air rifle. A lack of success with spotlight and PCP led to me borrowing a thermal monocular from a friend and that was a bit of a revelation as to how easy it was to spot the various critters running around and how many there were. The number of hedgehogs, rats, mice and hares was rather surprising.

Spotting them was one thing but doing something about it was another. Taking the thermal down to the block one night I saw three hares amongst the young vines so went back and got spotlight and rifle. Getting myself into position using the thermal I flicked the light on and –they scattered to all points of the compass. That went well I thought. I could see I was going to have to get a bit more serious.

A visit to my nephew Blair at his Waipukurau sports shop saw me returning home with a Bergara BMR in 17HMR and a Pard 008S night vision scope. Of course nothing ever goes

smoothly and in this case it was the 30 MOA rail the rifle is supplied with that was the problem. **It was impossible to sight in with the crosshair ending up right at the top of the image and still not on target.** I made up a mounting rail to suit and things went according to plan from there.

After the addition of some Primos trigger sticks and dive boots, which I thought would be perfect for sneaking up on the hares but the rest of my family thought were hilarious and named them the ninja boots, the balance definitely shifted my way. A steady stream of success saw me getting over 30 hares and a few bunnies out of that small block.

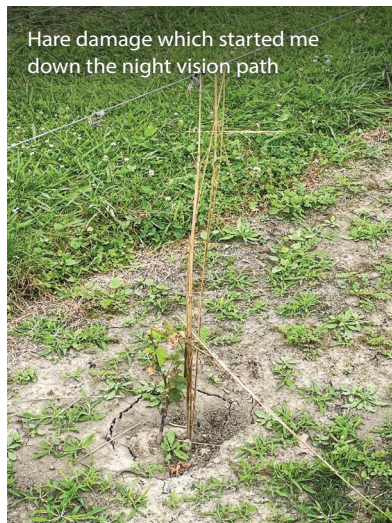
On the strength of this Greg clearly thought I was some sort of night vision expert as during a visit to NZ Hunter HQ he handed me a box and said 'here do a review of this' **and so that is how I came to be doing a review of the Pard TD32-70 thermal/night vision scope.**

There are so many options for personal preferences such as type and colour of the reticle, what you want your default settings to be and a host of other settings that I cannot possibly cover them all so this will be more of an overview

At first glance it is unlike a conventional scope with what seems like bits sticking out in all directions but with a bit of familiarity you realise there is a reason and a purpose to all of this.

The main tube objective houses the thermal lens, on the left is the laser range finding unit with a range of

Hare damage which started me down the night vision path



What the grapevines are supposed to look like



1000m/1200yds, on top is the day/night vision sensor and on the right is the infrared illuminator. The IR on this scope is a VCSEL unit which is laser as opposed to LED based. Broadly speaking this will give a little more range with less current draw. **They are available in both 850 and 940nm wavelengths.** The 850nm will give more distance than 940 but a faint red glow is visible at the emitter whereas the 940nm is completely invisible so for heavily hunted animals it may be an advantage. The unit under review is 850nm. The single 5000 mAh Li-ion battery is housed transversely in what would normally be the windage and side focus turrets. Towards the rear of the scope is the keypad housing and on/off button. It has an IP67 rating so should be able to handle all the weather conditions you are likely to be out in.

From the manual the day/night vision has a 1920 x 1080 resolution and a base magnification of 6.5 with x2 digital taking it to 13 (the screen shows 5.6 and 11.2). The thermal has a 384 x 288 resolution with a NETD of ≤ 25 mK (its ability to detect temperature differences) and a base magnification of 3 with again a x2 digital zoom.

Anyone who has used night vision equipment will have realised that there are pros and cons to them.

Thermal is easy to find things with and has impressive range but lacks clarity and it is not always easy to know exactly what you are looking at. Night vision with an IR illuminator is pretty much the opposite with animals more difficult to see if there is no eye shine and less range than thermal, but with clarity that thermal cannot match. This is probably the main purpose of the Multi-spectral TD32-70, being able to quickly see where something is with the thermal and then see what it is with night vision.

Mounting the scope on the rifle was straight forward once Blair had sent me a 0 MOA rail for the Bergara which were luckily now available. The Pard comes with a set of rings but they are quite high and with the low comb height of the rifle I chose to use some 30mm lows that I had sitting around.

The scope can be setup using picture in picture (PIP) where the main image can be day/night vision and the thermal image can be seen in the smaller inset image at the top of the screen. A CCW twist of what would be the elevation turret in a conventional scope reverses this and the thermal is now the main image. A CW twist zooms the image and this is how I had it setup.

Sighting in is accomplished using the one shot freeze frame method whereby after aiming at your target and firing a shot you



The day/night vision and IR illuminator can be seen above the objective housing



The new TD32-70 thermal/night vision scope above the Pard 008s scope I began with.

The extra capabilities of the TD32-70 vs the 008s come with a weight and size penalty



The balance had tilted my way

hold the crosshairs on the aiming mark and freeze the image this then allows you to move the crosshairs to the bullet hole. **The only unusual aspect to this is the need to sight in the day/night vision and thermal individually.**

The process went fairly well at the initial distance of 30yds. I had made a cross of silver duct tape for the thermal sight in and could see this but when I moved to 75yds it was not visible at all. After completing the final adjustment for the

day/night crosshairs I found a couple of small round stones that had heated up in the sun and placed them on top of the battens on the fence. They were highly visible through the thermal and so using the PIP I moved the thermals crosshairs until they lined up with the day/night ones. This was evidently successful because I was able to shoot one of the stones off with the thermal and the other with the day/night so had not bugged up anything in the process. The reticle



The first night out with the Pard

stays centred in the image so that is a plus.

Due to the limited time I had with the Pard and the relatively short range of most of my shooting I did not try to set up the ballistic function but it appears to be a proper ballistic calculator integrated with the laser rangefinder that overlays a corrected aiming mark on the reticle so would be useful for those shooting at longer ranges, especially at smaller targets like bunnies.

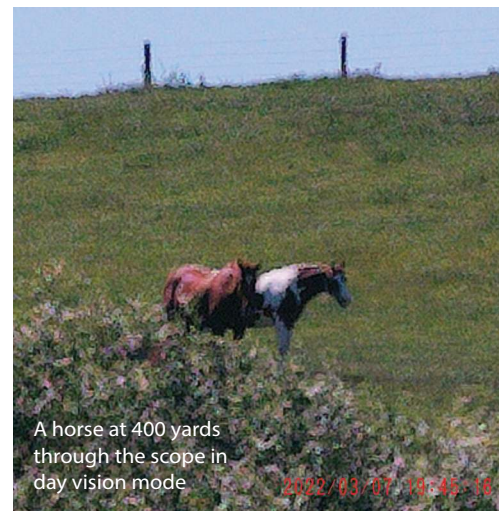
Speaking of bunnies I had noticed a bit of digging down some of the grape rows and so now the Pard was mounted and sighted in they were going to be the object of my attention. First up it wasn't a bunny but yet another hare sitting right in the middle of a row at 89m. The IR illuminator gave plenty of light and so with a good rest and the image zoomed up giving me a good sight picture I was able to comfortably account for it. First blood to the Pard. **Next was a small bunny at only 30m (the ninja boots were doing the business).** Using the thermal image in the PIP made it easy to find the bunny and get on target quickly making it relatively simple at that range to chalk up victim number two. Nothing else was spotted that night although I did get another hare and two rabbits the following night so I did a little experimenting with the IR illuminator. It has three power levels which are accessed through one of the buttons on the keypad and this button is also used to scroll through the various colour palettes such as white hot, black hot etc when in the thermal mode. It can also be zoomed from flood to spot by sliding the lens housing in and out. The rows are about 220m from one end to the other and with the IR set to its highest power and on spot I would be quite happy to take a shot at a rabbit or hare at that range if the scope was on something like my .204. Due to its lesser magnification and definition the thermal mode at that range



IR night vision (above) is better at showing detail of the target, but they're much easier to spot with the thermal, as below

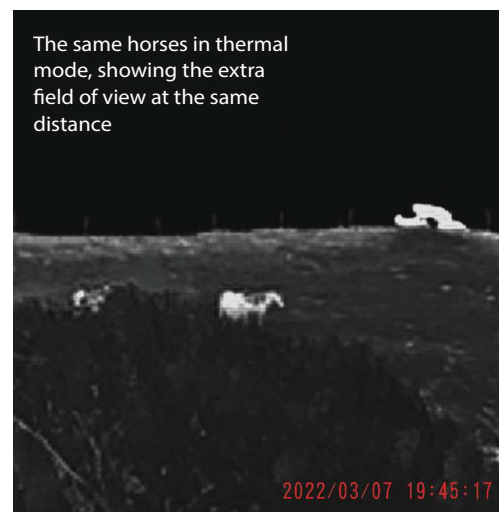
on small targets would have you aiming at just a small blob so it is probably best suited for finding and putting you on target then using the night vision for the actual shot.

At 800 gms without battery it is nearly double the weight of my Pard 008S and I certainly noticed the extra heft of the TD32-70 on my small and light 17HMR but not ridiculously so and certainly not considering its extra capability. **For somebody using a rifle for serious pest control or commercial hunting who not only needed to get on target quickly but needed to know exactly what they were looking at I think it would be right at home.**



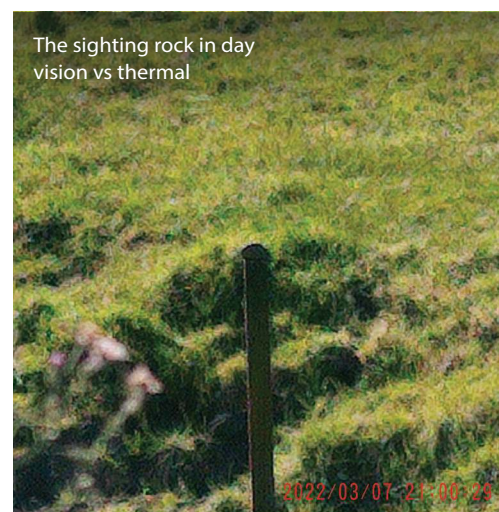
A horse at 400 yards through the scope in day vision mode

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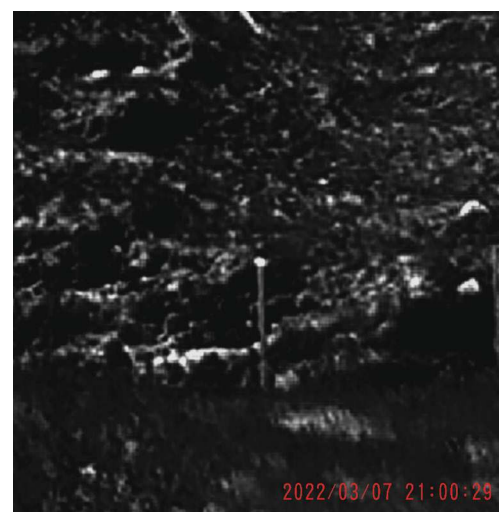
The same horses in thermal mode, showing the extra field of view at the same distance

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The sighting rock in day vision vs thermal

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A BIGHORN RAM FROM ALBERTA

WRITTEN BY ~ ARCHIE LANDALS

Lying very still in a shallow wrinkle on the hillside, I peered through the grass at the bighorn ram on the opposite side of the valley. We were hunting a spectacular area of the Rocky Mountains of Western Alberta; an area where all vehicle access is prohibited. The occasional person hikes into the area but, like us, almost all hunters use horses

One of my brothers has a string of good mountain horses that can be ridden or packed. Our gear sorted, pack horses loaded, and horses saddled we headed out late in the afternoon

One or two horses always want to assert their independence. By the following morning, the kinks are usually worked out, and things tend to go smoothly. A rather tricky trail on a steep, unstable slope beside a deep canyon deters casual users. Above the canyon, much of the trail is washed away by torrential floods. Creek crossings are numerous but not a problem in low water. A sudden heavy rain can make the return trip a different story. Swimming loaded horses across a raging ice-cold mountain stream is not something attempted by choice. Getting the horses through the thick willows and stunted spruce is a constant challenge where the trail is nonexistent. Equipment snags on the trees and packs need frequent adjustment.

The two young pack horses I was leading soon got tired and let me know that they had enough for the first day. First one and then the other

would plant all four feet and jerk the lead rope from my hand. I was wearing leather gloves, a lesson I learned the hard way from rope burns on my first trip. After getting on and off my saddle horse a dozen times to grab the lead ropes and get the pack horses reorganised they had me convinced. I also had had enough for the first day. Reaching a spot where we could camp, we stopped for the night. There are few suitable camping spots in the narrow mountain valleys. Camps have existed for decades in almost every place where there is a small patch of level, dry ground in proximity to grazing and water for horses. Most trails follow routes that were used by the native peoples before the first European trappers and explorers. As the weather was fine and we were only stopping for the night, we didn't bother setting up the tent. Sleeping under the stars is not recommended in grizzly country; humans in sleeping bag are soft tacos to a bear! Not convinced that a nylon or



thin canvas tent affords much additional protection we take our chances. Up at dawn on a frosty morning, we enjoyed bacon, eggs and coffee around a crackling fire as we thawed out. By late afternoon we reached a spot where we would camp for the duration of our hunt. Several grassy, alpine basins where sheep might be spotted could be reached on day rides from the camp. Moving camp every day is a great way to see a lot of beautiful country, but it significantly reduces the time left to hunt.

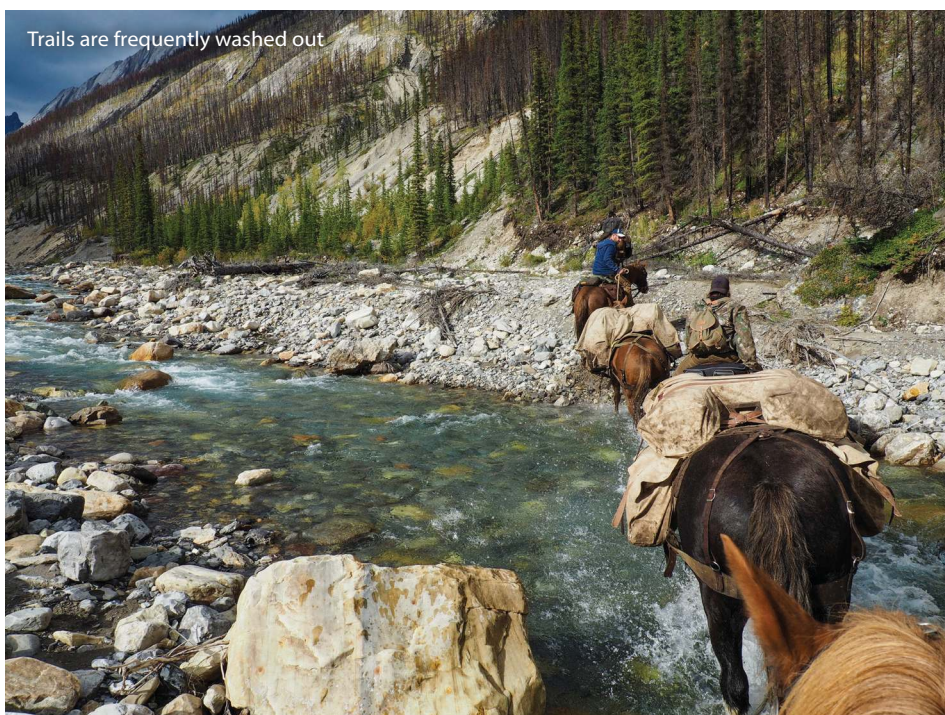
Mountain hunts are family affairs; usually three or four of us. The area we hunted on this trip consists of narrow steep-sided valleys. There is not enough grazing to support the horses of a larger group even though we pack pelletised food. Hunting sheep with horses is the ultimate mountain hunting experience. Leaving the well-trodden trails and bushwhacking into high basins, the incredibly tough mountain horses get you to places where you would never consider hiking. At times, we end up so far above tree line that there is not even a shrub to tether the horses. Tying them to large rocks, we scramble to the mountain peaks to see what is on the other side. Most of the basins are well hidden with no apparent trails. **Hunters are careful to take different routes and avoid making trails to keep their favourite spots secret.** Legal bighorn rams are scarce and hunters are as devious as fishermen when it comes to their favorite spots. Likely pockets of good habitat are only found after a number of trips exploring every nook and cranny within an area. October can be warm - sunny days with beautiful Fall colours, or there can be snow and extreme cold; it can change in a few hours. Being prepared for everything is seldom the difference between life and death but it frequently is the difference between a great adventure and a miserable trip.

Spotting a small band of ewes and lambs, we decided on a closer look.

One of us had a tag for a non-trophy sheep. Non-trophy tags are only valid for old ewes and cannot be used for lambs or young, non-trophy rams and are allocated by a draw system. The draws are based on priority, which increases for the hunter for each year applied and not drawn. A five or six priority is usually enough to get a tag for zones with good sheep populations. After carefully looking over the herd, an old ewe without a lamb was selected. Bagging a non-trophy sheep early in the hunt ensured fresh meat cooking over the fire for breakfast and supper and any left over can be taken home. Grouse are a treat when we find them. We occasionally shoot a few ptarmigan, spruce grouse, ruffed



Looking over a herd of ewes and lambs



Trails are frequently washed out





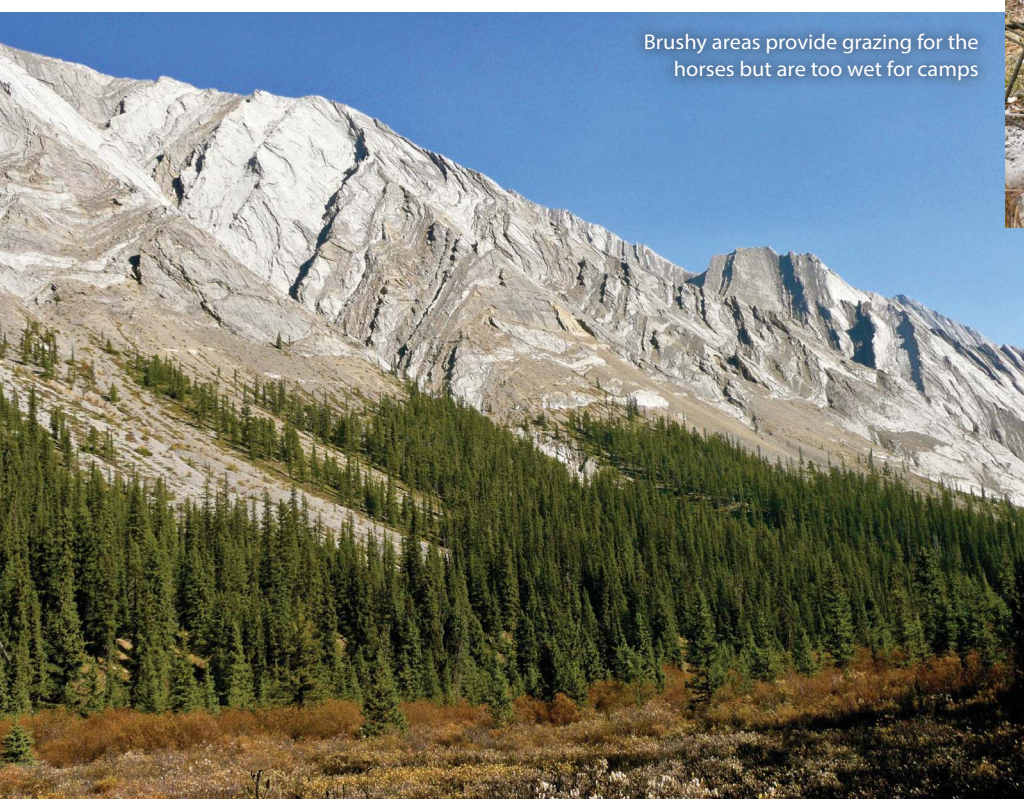
High country camp, sleeping tent and tarp shelter



A $\frac{3}{4}$ curl Bighorn ram



Biscuits for lunch on the trail - not what Kiwi's call biscuits though!



Brushy areas provide grazing for the horses but are too wet for camps

grouse and occasionally blue grouse, the largest of Alberta's native grouse. Our mountain hunts are the full package, riding, exploring, enjoying the scenery and camping. A late evening meal with a drink close at hand around a warm fire is a perfect end to the day. **A trophy ram might be the rationale for a trip but not finding one does not diminish the thrill of the adventure.** An upside of hunting on our own without a paid outfitter is that there is always next year, or perhaps a second trip the same year.

After checking out likely pieces of habitat for three or four days we spotted a dozen rams from the horses. They were well

over a kilometre away but definitely rams. Tying the horses in a clump of stunted fir out of sight of the sheep, we discussed how best to try and get close enough for a shot if there was a legal ram in the bunch. The wind was in our favour but there were no trees in the vicinity of the sheep to conceal our approach. Taking advantage of the terrain was the only way to stay out of sight. My brothers would stay on the back side of the ridge and try a long circular stalk. They hoped to get high enough to sneak on the rams from above, always the preferred approach. I decided to move back under the brow of the ridge the sheep were on and creep cautiously in their direction.

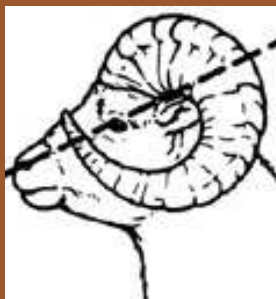
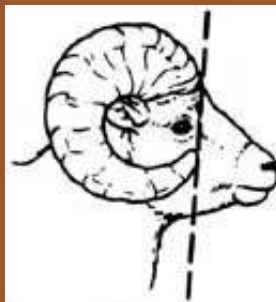
I did not expect to get very close before running out of cover. There was a chance that the rams might be pushed in my direction. Terrain in the mountains is never smooth but I got lucky. I was able to stay below the line of sight where the sheep might spot me until I was within about 500 metres. **Carefully scrutinizing my surroundings, I found a small trough, really only a wrinkle in the surface of the slope opposite the sheep, only about a foot deep.** By crawling on my belly, a challenge for a 65-year-old, I was able to get within 250 metres. I would have liked to get closer for a better look but that meant the sheep would be able to see me for five metres before I got back in the trough. Peeking through the grass with my 10x binoculars I studied what I was sure was the biggest ram. A ram needed to be a $\frac{4}{5}$ curl to be legal in that area. That meant that a straight line from the tip of the horn to the front of the base of the horn must pass in front of the eye. The ram would turn his head slightly toward me and I would decide he was about 2 cm beyond the legal limit. **He would then turn a bit the other way and I would think he was 2 cm short.** I was always looking at the left horn of the ram. I never did get a close look at the horn on the right side. Only one horn is needed to meet the minimum requirement. I watched for about 20 minutes trying to

make up my mind. Eventually, the ram stood up and started feeding up the slope. I let him go. Strongly influencing my decision not to shoot was the fact that I already had a full curl ram on the wall. Sitting there thinking about my ram, memories came flooding back.

It was 50 years ago that I shot a trophy ram but I remember the details as if it was yesterday. I can still hear the wind in the pines and smell the fir trees near timberline. In the late 1960's, southwestern Alberta was my favorite destination. The red rock canyons with their creeks flowing from the front ranges of the mountains were spectacular scenery and reasonably accessible on foot after parking a highway vehicle. **My hunting equipment included little more than my rifle, a small tent and sleeping bag in those days.** Exploration for oil and gas was minimally regulated at the time, and there were some ugly scars on the landscape. A 4x4 truck could be driven to the mountain tops along several of these cat tracks. In the high, mountain country, bighorn sheep were usually encountered. There were a lot of good rams at the time, sometimes in bands of a dozen or more. Come hunting season we always had a sheep tag, just in case.

Three of us started up one of the canyons in mid-afternoon on a fine October day. In those days, I could really walk and were soon about eight kilometres from where we left the truck. We were enjoying the Fall scenery and there was always the chance we might see a mule deer buck, a bull elk or a bighorn ram. **Approaching the tree line, glimpses of the rocky peaks began to appear. Near the head of the valley, we started to see sheep.** A few small bands were carefully glassed but they were all ewes and lambs. There may have been one small ram but they are very difficult to distinguish from the ewes. It did not matter as even that far back a ram had to be at least a $\frac{3}{4}$ curl. Moving on slowly, a small opening allowed us to glass the slopes again. Two big rams appeared in the valley, with one on the south side alone. The one up the steep northern side of the valley was accompanied by several sub-legal rams. All were watching us as we discussed strategy. We decided to enter a small stand of aspen trees and then two of us would step back to where the sheep could watch us. I don't remember if one of us had read this strategy somewhere or if we decided on our own that sheep could not count. Letting the sheep watch us for a while we tried the strategy again. This time I remained in the aspen and went after the ram on the north side of the valley. **Once I entered the aspen, I was on my own trusting to memory of the landscape and sense of direction to where I was heading.** I would not be able to see the ram I was after until I climbed a rock wall not far from where he stood. I had no way of knowing if he was still there: there was nothing to do but keep on the stalk. On the positive side, the ram could not see me and the down-valley breeze was in my favour.

On the lower part of the slope I was in thick brush



Bighorn Sheep Alberta facts

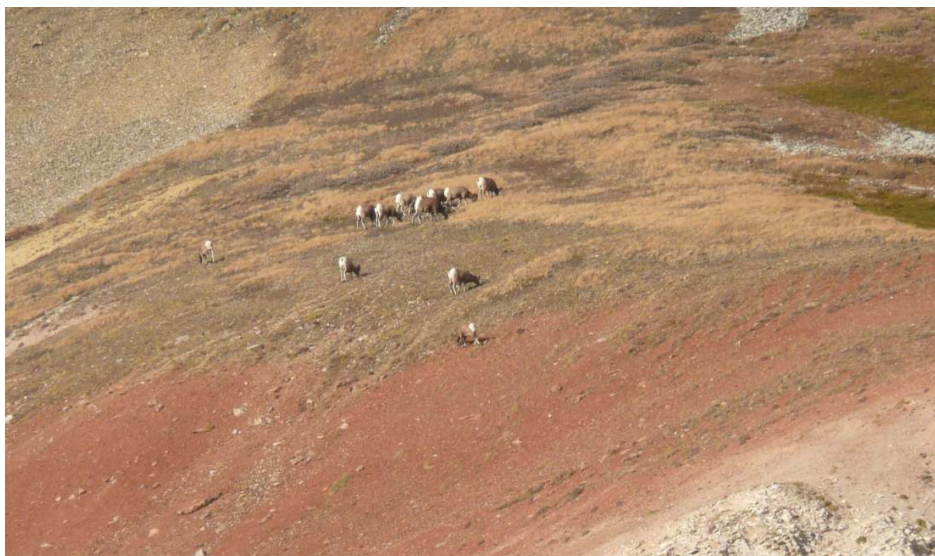
Range: Rocky Mountains of Western Alberta
Sheep range: Approximately 30,000 km sq.
Total population: Approximately 10,000
4,500 in Parks closed to hunting
Average age trophy rams: 6 and 8 years
Average lifespan: up to 16 years
Trophy ram licenses per year: 2,000
Trophy rams harvested per year: 180
Hunter success: less than 10%

Legal Rams in Alberta

Here are diagrams for legal rams. Some zones require 4/5 curl while others are full curl. If these diagrams are useful you can copy and paste the ones below. They are out of the hunting regulations so they are about as clear as I can find.



The stunning colours of Alberta backcountry





Trophy bighorn, author on the right



Hunting with horses in spectacular alpine scenery is an adventure few get to experience

hand hold and every place I put my foot making sure that not even a pebble rolled to alert the ram. **Reaching the rim, I cautiously peeked over.** The ram was now lying down but luckily facing away from me. What should I do? I did not want to try hitting him in the head. It was a risky target and could damage the trophy. I carefully lay my rifle on a flat patch of grass and wormed my way over the rim. Rising to one knee, I was picking up my rifle when the ram detected something and stood up. Broadside at 100 metres I centered the crosshairs and squeezed the trigger. I was using my 30:06 Remington pump and shooting 180 grain Remington Bronze Points. **Through the scope, I saw the hair move where the bullet hit, then it struck the rock face of the headwall cirque about a half mile beyond.** The bullet had gone clean through, and I was afraid that I had not made a killing shot. The ram took a couple of steps toward the cliff face below, changed his mind and headed up slope. I emptied my rifle but missed every shot at the running ram, rattled enough that I rushed my shots. Quickly changing clips, I was ready to shoot as soon as the smaller ram in the line of fire was out of the way. Before I had a chance to pull the trigger, the big ram

dropped. Walking over, ready to finish the job, he was stone dead. He had bled out from a heart shot but ran to the final second. After a short breather I hiked over to my friend's ram. Between the three of us we got the first ram to the truck. One of us carried the cape and head while the other two packed the meat. A second trip retrieved my ram. It was well after midnight by the time we had everything loaded. We had walked between 45 and 50 kilometres but adrenalin kept fatigue at bay. My beautiful full curl ram was the first head I had mounted. Somehow, as a struggling student, I managed to scrape up the money for the taxidermist. It would be almost 40 years before the ram was joined on the wall by another trophy. **First on the wall, my bighorn ram is still one of my favorite trophies.**



and could see very little in any direction. Through small openings I looked across the valley at the ram that my friend was stalking, and twenty minutes after starting my stalk I heard a shot. I was in a small opening and could watch the action. The ram was now running uphill, faster every time a shot was fired. I saw several bullets strike the rocks well below the target. By the fifth shot, he had the range which was perhaps 500 metres. **I saw the ram flinch and knew he had a hit, but how good I could not tell.** Reloading, my friend was back on the ram which was now running across the slope rather than uphill. It fell after a couple more shots. Later, when we examined his ram, we found that it had been hit twice; once through the lungs and once in the foot.. I was still less than halfway to where I had last seen the ram I was stalking. I was wondering if he was still there and

what I should do, but of course there was only one option: I had to continue my stalk and hope for the best. I was nursing a nagging cough and every few minutes had to clear my throat. I was determined not to let the ram know my whereabouts by hearing me cough. What an effort to stifle a cough for over an hour. **I got to the point where I could see the rock wall and knew the ram was not far; if he was still around.** I looked carefully back and forth along the ten-meter cliff before me, trying to recall every detail that I had seen from the bottom. I needed to find a spot where I could climb and it needed to be in the right place. If I poked my head above the ledge too close to the ram and was spotted, I knew my hunt was over, but if I was too far away, there was no cover to continue a stalk. I picked what I hoped would be the right spot and started to climb, carefully selecting every



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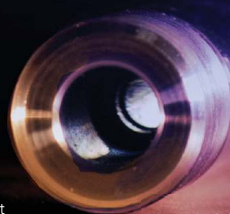
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IT'S BEEN A WHILE

WRITTEN BY ~ COREY CARSTON

WHILE I WAS PUTTING THE FINISHING TOUCHES ON ANOTHER ARTICLE, IT DAWNED ON ME THAT IT'S BEEN TOO LONG SINCE I WROTE AN ARTICLE ABOUT GEESE. LIKE FAR TOO LONG...

There are many reasons for this shortfall. We all know that COVID-19 caused disruption not only to work but also to our recreational time. Due to recent dry spells, geese have been displaced from my best hunting spots, and, if I'm totally honest, there weren't any hunts that really stood out!

As we rolled into 2023, I'd started to recover a bit of the old goose hunting bug and with a few close mates, decided that goose hunting was moved from the third preferred

summer activity (after deer hunting and trout fishing) to number one, albeit only for a little while until the roar and duck season rolled around.

The first few hunts of the year reminded me of how challenging and enjoyable it was to hunt, especially after other hunters had already tried to shoot the naturally wary bird, making them even more cautious. This hunt started with a text from Stu, the brother-in-law of my good mate Lyndon. He had found a substantial mob of geese not far away from where I live (literally five minutes away). I've often referred to this mob as my pets and I'd hunted them a few times on a neighbouring property with reasonable success.



When I'd first seen them, the numbers had been reasonably low, with only around a hundred geese.

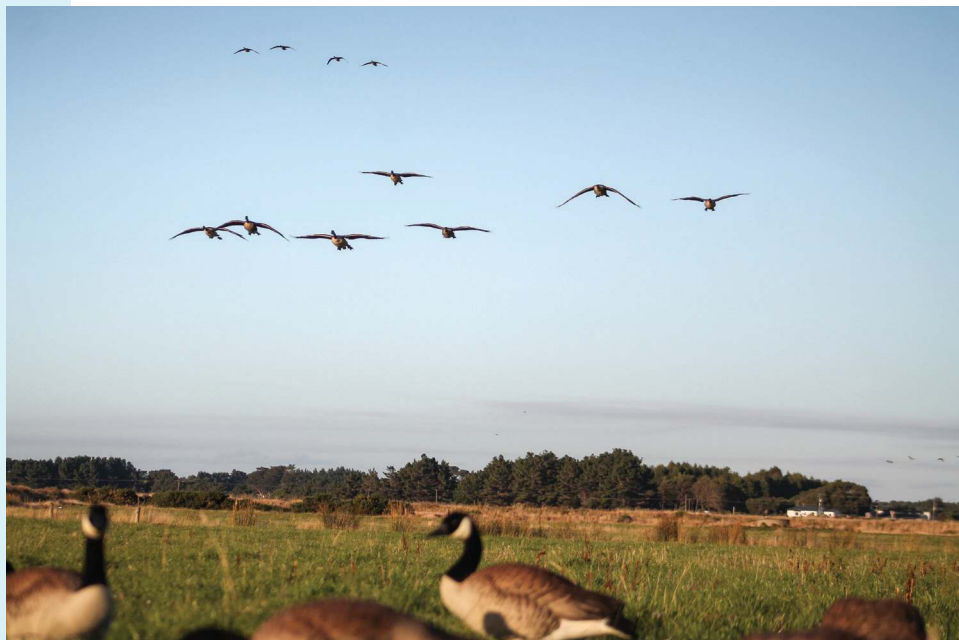
But every year numbers had gradually increased to what was now a fairly significant mob. They were deemed a rather challenging hunt as they roost a mere few hundred metres away from the paddock they feed in. We had tried to hunt them in various conditions i.e. different winds, tides, both mornings and nights and in various weather conditions. All worked to a degree but with the numbers of birds around, we failed to put a significant dent in the population, and as the sole predator of geese in New Zealand, we really need to be taking a heavy toll on them when we can.

I was hesitant to agree to a weekend of hunting geese, as I know how difficult they can be to hunt. Especially after Lyndon messaged me, inviting me to join him for a "guaranteed hundred bird shoot" in Otago. The previous weekend I'd turned him down for a similar hunt that turned out to be, not surprisingly, a hundred bird hunt.

With a Saturday morning at work looming and me trying to bank a few days annual leave for the upcoming year, and my traditional first week of duck season holiday, I had to turn him down once again to wait for the glory photos that I knew were coming from him and our other mate David. **With that in mind and geese firmly on the brain, I made a phone call to Stu about these local geese.**

To put the hurt on as many geese as possible, we needed a good crew to help us out. My mate Jack was top of the list as all summer I'd be promising him a hunt. Jack was sort of keen and got keener still when he was told he could turn up whenever he liked and leave whenever. This meant no grassing blinds for him (his least favourite thing ever) and even better, he would avoid the time-consuming task of packing up. Stu had a buddy of his lined up but unfortunately, he had to pull the pin leaving one more spot for the crew. My mate Paul drew the lucky straw and officially became the fifth man.

Arriving at the farm, Jack and I met up with Stu. He'd had been there quite a while just to make sure there was no early bird movement - and if there was, he'd be able to keep tabs on them. I was soon to discover just how much time he had spent down here talking to the farmers getting intel on the geese and watching the geese's movements. For two days in a row, he watched them from 5.30 pm until well after dark (which was close to 10 pm) and again in the early mornings from near first light until they had returned mid-morning to the roost.

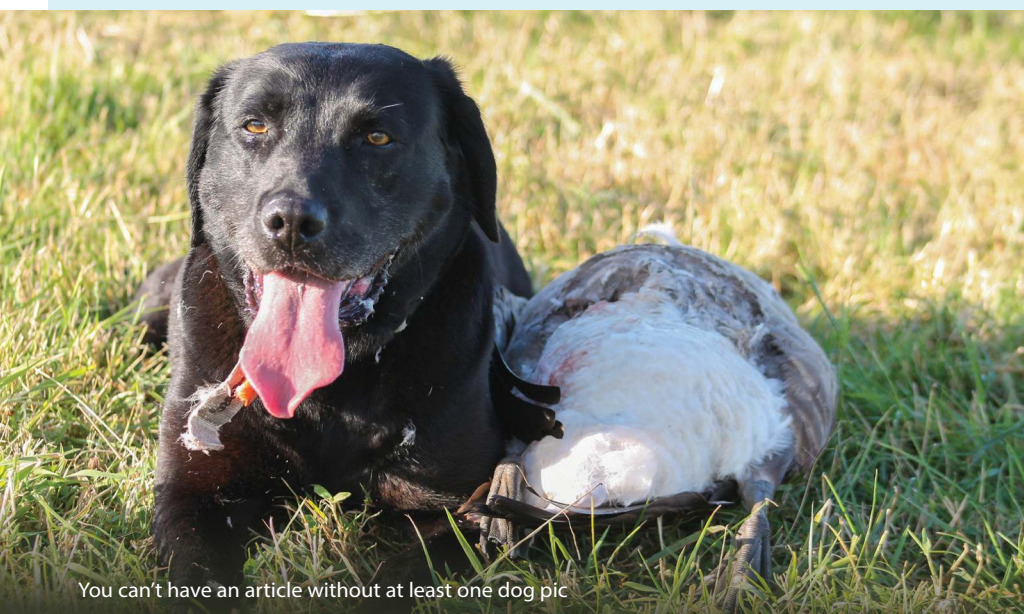


With four skilled shooters to my left and the geese flying into the paddock without any need for calling, I found it simpler to put away my goose call and instead pick up my big camera to capture the moment





You don't need to have a big hunt to have fun when your entertained by these turkeys



You can't have an article without at least one dog pic

As a result of this information gathering exercise, Stu easily led us to the paddock where the geese spent most of their time. A quick scout around was required to find the optimum spot to set up in the paddock. There were several factors that influenced our decision on where to set up for hunting the geese. We considered the wind direction, the height of the paddock, and the distance from any cover. Additionally, we anticipated the flight path of the geese and chose a spot accordingly. **With a heap of hunters and pre-cut blind grass set up seemed to take no time at all.**

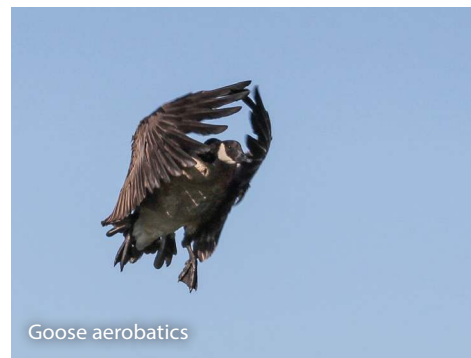
The first goose sighting of the day is always a special occasion and often it can give you an indication on how the hunting is going to pan out.

Jack was the first to sight the geese that evening but by the time he tried explaining to the rest of us where they were, they were already out of sight. Nevertheless, we had seen our first mob of geese and now had a lock on where they were roosting. Five pairs of keen

eyes closely observed the next mob that appeared. They headed in the same direction as before and were soon lost out of sight, nowhere near us. **With the awesome scouting job Stu had done over the last few days he was confident he knew exactly where they had headed.** He'd seen two hundred odd going in there but reassured us that the bulk of the mob was feeding and using this paddock, and not to panic as they were going to turn up anytime soon.

Approximately twenty minutes later, there were already more than two hundred geese present on the farm next door. Despite Stu's assurances, four out of the five members of the group were unsure about the geese heading towards their way.

As is often the case when you start to lose confidence or your mind starts to wander, something suddenly happens. Someone called out 'geese' and all eyes focused in the distance to where they had previously been seen, only for nothing to



Goose aerobatics

appear. Then a voice yells out 'not there, in front' and sure enough seven geese were beating low into the wind directly downwind of us. The panic set in as ear plugs and muffs were rammed over or into ears, lost calls were found and blind doors were hurriedly shut.

I had a new secret weapon that I was very much looking forward to trying out on this hunt. I was lucky enough to have a prototype Season Calls short reed goose call to use, and with its deeper sound, I was picking it was going to be a winner.

This season, just like the one before and the one before that, my priority has been to capture some decent action photos. This year, unlike in previous years, I had already begun well. With four skilled shooters to my left and the geese flying into the paddock without any need for calling, I found it simpler to put away my goose call and instead pick up my big camera to capture the moment. The geese and the boys read the script perfectly and as the geese started landing procedures, I managed to sneak the camera unobserved over top of the blind and get a few good photos before the blinds and guns erupted and all seven geese lay in various states of disrepair in the carefully prepared hole where we had hoped they would land.

While the rest of the guys happily yahooped I had a quick look at the photos I'd taken, hoping against hope that some of them would be magazine quality. Fortunately, I was very pleased with the incoming photos but sadly the action shots I was hoping for weren't nearly as good.

There was no time to dwell on things as more geese were on the wing. This was a better-sized mob that had heard the previous shots and needed me to do some convincing on the call. Unfortunately, I had my hands full and was unable to get the camera out. It did mean I could now use the Benelli.

At 20 metres the geese looked huge but still I let them come on that little bit more before I called the shot. **Five autos roared and geese were raining out of the sky like, well, rain.**

We didn't have to wait long for the next



mob and despite there being a good number of them we almost got caught out. They came in so low, slow and quiet that we were caught off guard. Saying that, by the time they were over the decoys, we were ready. If we thought we'd taken a good toll on the last mob this one was an absolute train wreck. Everywhere I looked, geese were falling from the sky. Often when a big mob comes I'll pick out the first two birds then lose the plot and blaze away at the remainder, often with little or no result but this time I stayed reasonably calm and picked up five geese with my five shots.

After that hectic start, things slowed down somewhat with more regular evenly spaced smaller mobs turning up. This was ideal as it gave me precious time to continue sneaking the out camera. I even managed to get the odd good photo or two.

With no more geese sighted it was time to take stock of the area around us. **There were empty shells lying around the decoys and numerous downed geese with their bellies facing up, and the odd one that walked that couldn't fly sneaking away into a nearby creek.** All of this made things look rather messy and all had the potential to scare wary geese. While the boys had a tidy up I let the hound off its chain and she made quick



The mad rush to pick up geese before the next flight



work of the wounded ones. Once she had done a few victory laps and showed all of us how clever she was it was back on her chain, and not a moment too soon as more geese were soon spotted.

The mob had built up big time and all

the geese that were now leaving the roost were playing follow the leader. Stu made a desperate text to the farm owner to see if he could move them off and mere minutes later a ute could be seen heading in the direction of the geese.

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Answering the age old question of how many geese can you fit in the back of a Triton... lots

Soon the air was alive with not only the sight but also the sound of 400-plus geese that, either by luck or design, headed our way. A hurried council was called and despite the itchy trigger fingers not one of that massive mob flying less than 20 metres above us was harmed. We could have easily dumped 12 or more out of it, but what was the point of a dozen in the bag and 388 educated?

After a wait of 30 minutes, where there was absolutely no action, we could hear nearby geese starting to get edgy and for the next hour or more, we had some small but regular flights. By now we knew we had a fair few birds on the ground and general consensus was that we must be getting pretty close to the magical hundred. We'd tried a couple of times to have a count up but each time more geese were heard or spotted and

all attempts at counting failed miserably.

Too soon it was dark and as no one had any pressing plans for Sunday it was unanimously agreed that we would leave the decoys out overnight to come back first thing in the morning and hopefully shoot a few more birds. So it was time to pack up, get some photos and have a tally up of the evening's hunt.

The next morning dawned with a red sky heralding what was to become a rather wet afternoon. As we didn't want to spend days drying out flocked decoys and their bags, we packed up reasonably early but not before we had added another 25 nice decoying geese to the weekend's bag.

With the gear safely stashed in the utes



Paul, Jack and Stu with a pretty impressive pile of geese

just before it started to drizzle it was time for the all-important count up. It didn't take long before we passed the magical hundred mark and everyone was guessing as to how many there were. I can't recall who got closest but I can remember that there was over 160 of the big birds loaded into the back of Jack's Triton. It was a good thing he had aftermarket suspension on the old girl.

On the drive back home, another good mob of two hundred geese were spotted even closer to town. I don't think another goose hunt will be as delayed as this one was.



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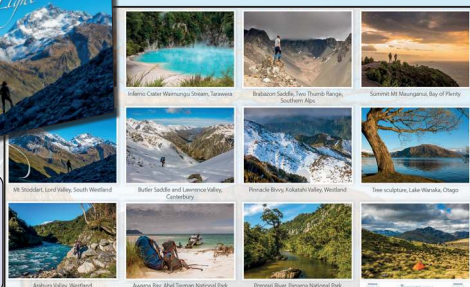
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RRP: \$490-630

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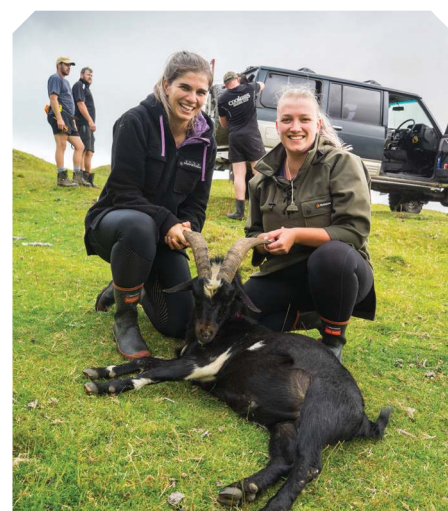
COMMUNITIES GET BEHIND THE NATIONAL WILD GOAT HUNTING COMPETITION

COMMUNITIES NATIONWIDE HAVE GOT BEHIND THE NATIONAL WILD GOAT HUNTING COMPETITION, A COLLECTIVE EFFORT RESULTED IN THE REMOVAL OF THOUSANDS OF WILD GOATS.

The competition closed 26 November, with the prize draw on 15 December. Check out the Facebook pages of the Department of Conservation and New Zealand Deerstalkers Association to find out who won. There were over \$50,000 worth of prizes up for grabs.

Although the competition is over, wild goats breed quickly. It's important to keep getting out there to help protect the environment. Here at NZ Hunter, we are looking forward to getting out on a wild goat hunting adventure with the prize winner from our category.

This collaborative competition to raise awareness of the wild goat problem was a joint endeavour by the Department of Conservation and the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association. It was supported by Federated Farmers of New Zealand, and Hunting & Fishing NZ Ltd.



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Supported through funding from Jobs for Nature and including contributions from 24 other hunting and outdoor sector organisations, Better Hunting provides hunters with free online training on the fundamentals of hunting and hunter safety in New Zealand. It is designed to help both new and experienced hunters learn skills that can assist them to hunt more safely and successfully.

28 individual modules make up the programme and cover important aspects of hunting such as navigation, weather forecasting, outdoors safety, firearms safety and technique, game animal management, harvesting mahinga kai and butchery. The modules not only provide educational content but are deliberately developed to be interactive. This means learners need to really engage their brain to perform certain tasks, which of course will help them retain the most important information.

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Aim

Once you've identified your target beyond all doubt and decided you're going to shoot it, aim the rifle at the target. You want your position as natural and comfortable as possible.

Remember your ethical shot spots. New hunters should stick with the hilar zone until you're

Breath

Trigger

Don't close one eye. Keeping the other one open helps with your situational awareness around the target AND your shooting position, with no detriment to your aiming.

Your rifle should be in the ACTION state. That means there's a live cartridge in the chamber, the bolt is closed, and it's just the safety stopping the trigger.

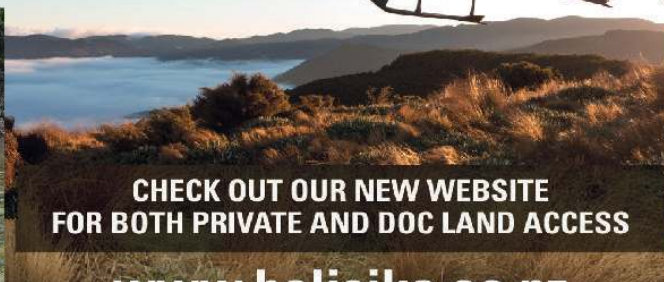
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SO, YOU WANT TO SMOKE? PART 3

WRITTEN BY ~ RICHARD HINGSTON

For those that are interested, I purchased an Oklahoma Joe Bronco for home

I like the size and functionality and the flexibility to cook ribs standing up or brisket on a shelf, or being able to move the fire up to the top in order to sear meat. I like the flavour profile of charcoal but can add wood for a twist, and I appreciate the ease with which it keeps the heat.

I also like the fact that it isn't reliant on electricity. It also allows me to sit and attend to the air flow and spritz while having a craft beer and or a bourbon – a good excuse anyway!! For work I use a Traeger Ironwood 885 as it is easy to set and forget and the consistency it brings means anyone can use it. We also have a Bradleys Smoker, which I like to use for fish but has been used for many other things, such as lamb and venison.

RUBS

These are some of the rubs I like and use often; Al's Lamb from Geraldine, Rum and Que, Smokey Ts (who now also produce a black rub which is awesome on veni), and Elk Creek who are out of the States. The Four Saucemen have a great range, and I have also been told that their lamb rub is a winner on venison!! They won a competition with this so it must be. At work, we use The Four Saucemen products because they provide great results for our smoking needs. Some are

available in the supermarket or DIY stores and, of course, at your local hunting shops. Everyone will have a favourite go-to, and I haven't tried them all, but these are my favourites to date. It's a bit like Pinot Noir - I'm working my way through them, and one day I might get to the end of them all!

FIRE LIGHTING

Let's get this thing started!

Obviously, I'm talking about the charcoal and/or wood variety as you electric dudes can plug in, switch it on and start, while the rest of us will just have to fire it up. As mentioned, lump wood or charcoal will give you a nice and

long burn, but if using brickettes then they can last even longer depending on how you light it. Fill your basket up with your chosen fuel type, and if using a fire starter, you may wish to light it at one side (say at 12 o'clock if in a round basket). The one-sided approach means that the fuel will burn across and down, giving you a longer burn - but remember that the heat source will also move slightly as the fuel burns.

Another way is to place the starters in three positions at say 12, 4 and 8 o'clock if it is in a round basket; this way, it burns more evenly. It will burn slightly quicker, but you will still get a good long burn of six or more hours. Another way is to use what they call a snake, where you lay a couple of rows of briquettes almost all the way around the perimeter



of your basket, arrange the fire starter at the beginning of the snake and then light it. As it burns, it then lights the next briquette and so on. You can also start things off by using a chimney, which will start the process quicker but let's face it, what's a 15 minute head start over a six-hour burn anyway?

And of course, if all else fails and you can't be bothered cooking you only need to google 'slow cooked BBQ' as there are so many outlets doing this style of cookery!! Luckily my local is Smokey Ts in Christchurch, and Tristin is a top bloke with many awards under his belt from the hospitality industry. If you are either in Christchurch or passing through, then I recommend that you check him out. It's evident that others agree as he's going through ½ a ton of brisket a week along with ½ a ton each of pork ribs and pork belly, not to mention the chicken as well!!

If you have purchased a smoker, then I

hope this has helped, and you are getting some good results.

Here are a couple of relevant quotes to finish off this series:

"The only time to eat diet food is while you're waiting for the steak to cook"

"BBQ etiquette - BBQ is the height of sophistication, and as you well know, to avoid a social faux pas at your next BBQ, don't ask for ketchup. Ask for a bottle of red. Keep it classy!!"

Thanks again to the following who helped out with their time and advice

BBQs Direct in CHCH www.bbqsdirect.co.nz for anything BBQ smoking and a great place to start with service to match

The Four Sauccemen in Auckland www.thefoursaucemen.co.nz who love competitions and have a great product, helpful website, and offer classes.



With all meat, trim the excess fat and sinew, dust the meat all over with your choice of rub, or just season it with salt and pepper. Once the BBQ is up to temperature and burning nicely with a blue smoke, place the meat in. Following is a guide to cooking the most common items, and don't forget to spritz throughout the cooking process.

Chicken wings:

Cooking temp 170°C. Cook for 45 minutes then glaze and give another 15 minutes. Rest ten minutes and serve. Ensure sure that it isn't pink at the bone and has reached an internal temperature 85-90° C.

Pork baby back ribs:

Cooking temp 135°C. Cook for three hours then wrap in butchers paper and cook for another two hours or until internal temperature reaches 96°C. Remove the paper, glaze, and cook for 30 minutes. Wrap and cover rest for a further 30 minutes, working on the theory of 3-2-1 (three hours cook, two hours wrapped and one hour rest)

Brisket:

Known as the king of smoked meats. Cooking temperature 135°C. Cook about six hours depending on size, with an internal temperature of 70°C. Wrap and cook three more hours to get an internal temp of 96°C. Rest one hour then slice.

Meat patties:

190/200gm each. Cooking temperature 110°C and cook for 45 - 60 minutes, to an internal temperature of 75°C. Rest ten minutes, then sear the burger on the BBQ to caramelise the outside if you wish.

Reverse sear Tomahawk steak or rib on the bone:

Cooking temperature 115°C cook 30 - 40 minutes depending on size, internal temp 54°C remove and rest, then heat the grill to very hot and sear on the outside. Rest for five to ten minutes.



Brisket done right



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